# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ~~THE~~ TRADITIONAL POLITICAL ORGANISATION OF KERALA AND PUNJAB

by

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## Abstract.

The problem of the thesis is the relationship of caste, or caste systems, to forms of political organisation, before the bureaucratic centralisation of the British had made caste politically irrelevant in formal terms. Anthropological studies of caste indicate that there was a multiplicity of chiefs usually belonging to one caste, spread over a region, and having relatively intense political interaction with each other.

Two traditional systems are examined in detail. These are Kerala up to 1792 and Punjab up to 1848. Both systems have a social stratification into castes. Kerala has the typical Hindu caste system, polarised in terms of purity and pollution between Brahmins and Untouchables. It was relatively independent of external political opposition till 1792. Punjab, subject to greater political flux, also has a stratification into castes, but the bases of stratification are not so clearly formulated in terms of purity and pollution, and there is a significant development of a sect - the Sikhs - who denied stratification into castes. Such denial served a purpose in organising the system against external political opposition - from the Muslims - but did not successfully abolish such stratification.

In both systems, there existed a political system

characterised by the dispersal of power among chiefs of one or two castes who interacted closely with each other in relationships of conflict or alliance. Various factors contributed to the containment of conflict among the several competing chiefs. Competition for power was confined to the chiefs. It never occurred between social strata.

The system of dispersal of power gave way to a politically centralised system in South Kerala from 1729 and in Punjab from 1790. In both cases, one of the competing chiefs annihilated and absorbed rival chiefs. A small initial advantage in resources was strengthened by them by the use of mercenary armies and a salaried administrative cadre, instead of the hereditary warriors and hereditary officials characteristically used by the chiefs in the older system.

The local centralisation in the two regions failed to displace the earlier system, as did the pre-Islamic Hindu empires with their wider centralisation. In every case, the caste stratification persisted. Caste stratification, where it provides the only system of ranking, is incompatible with centralisation. Factionalisation or dispersal of power is its necessary political concomitant.

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## Foreword.

The study of literate societies by anthropologists opens up new possibilities of research. Written records add a dimension to the analysis of contemporary societies. Where they date to the past, they provide material for the reconstruction of systems the knowledge of which cannot be acquired in any other way. Maurice Freedman underlined the fruitfulness of written materials in the study of inaccessible societies in the Malinowski lecture of 1963, "A Chinese Phase in Social Anthropology." The contemporary accessibility of Indian societies, be they villages or regions, has tended to encourage field research. Only one or two anthropologists have tried to analyse past Indian societies. There is however no anthropological monograph on a historical Indian society. Historical research on India shows that the data is rich, especially on political events and persons. The study of political systems can be furthered enormously by the use of historical data. The present analysis of Kerala and Punjab during the period that they were independent political systems is an attempt at anthropological analysis of historical

materials.

Kerala and Punjab were selected for analysis on the assumption that they represented two extreme types of Indian society. It is generally known that caste stratification in Kerala was sharply polarised between Brahmins and Untouchables in terms of ritual purity and pollution. In Punjab on the other hand, untouchability is much less severe, Brahmins are not as sharply set off by ritual purity, and there is an overt, consistent sectarian development which set aside ritual criteria of stratification. Kerala and Punjab are thus assumed to be polar opposites which define all other Indian societies between them. Obviously, this can only be proved by further comparative studies of other regional societies of India.

The historical background of the two regions selected here supports the choice of these as radically opposed types. Kerala, between the ninth and eighteenth centuries, was not ruled by any outside power. Foreign influence and power was confined to commercial activity. In the case of Punjab, there has been a constant influx of outside powers, even before the Muslim invasions, and

Punjab was almost never independent before the eighteenth century. Kerala therefore was far less subject to political disruption than the Punjab. Whether in this respect as well they are extreme types of Indian societies again requires confirmation by further comparative analyses.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

In any anthropological research, certain assumptions are made of a general nature. These cannot always be proved empirically. But it is necessary to give reasons for holding these assumptions, if there is to be a strong foundation for the subsequent building of hypotheses. A basic assumption that may either precede or follow the selection of a problem is that the area of study - a certain territory, or a group of people - is a valid isolate, that it hangs together internally so as to form a system, and that it can be separated from other groups, or territories, with which it is physically contiguous and with which it may have a high degree of interaction.

The problem of the present thesis is the relationship between political organisation and caste stratification in the traditional period. I expand later on the terms caste, political organisation, and traditional. Before that, it is necessary to state the initial and basic assumption, made throughout, that linguistic regions in India are so many separate caste systems. This assumption, simple though it seems, is not universally accepted, especially by social anthropologists with field experience of caste. To the field worker, the study of interactions is paramount. He equates

the field of interactions with a social system, and denies any other basis for defining the outer boundaries of a social system. A caste system to him would be the group of villages among whom there is, or was, where modern communications have developed, effective interaction. Before the development of modern communications, interaction among the different parts, or tracts, of a linguistic region was extremely limited. It will be shown later that such interaction, though limited in the sense that it was relatively infrequent, and that it did not involve economic or political interdependence, occurred in crucial spheres, within an accepted framework of customary rules and values. These interactions linked the various parts of a linguistic region into a system. If we take the quality or the level of interaction rather than its quantity (that is, frequency), as our criterion, we shall find later that the assumption that a linguistic region is a discrete caste system, or society, is justified. The attempt to draw a boundary by starting from a small-scale unit, such as a village, and following up the range of interactions radiating outwards from it, is empirically acceptable, but may not further analysis. The frequency, rather than the nature of the interaction, would tend to be emphasised.

Common language does not necessarily entail cultural homogeneity. Here again, a field worker notices cultural heterogeneity, and may mark off culturally differentiated

areas within a linguistic region.[1] Such cultural areas are accepted as the social system of which the villages being investigated are a part. Cultural heterogeneity indicates limited communication in the region, which in its turn accounts for localised interaction. But it does not mean that the local area is an isolated unit that can be fully studied without reference to any wider system. The larger region, sharing a language, is not merely a cultural region of which this unit is a part. The units interact with each other. The linguistic region is not a collection of culturally similar areas. It is a social system consisting of independent and territorially distinct units, held together by certain regular, recurrent interactions.

Obviously, whether one takes the local interactional, (or cultural) area as the unit of study, or one takes the wider area, depends on one's interest. My contention is that the local unit is only theoretically an isolate, and that it cannot be fully understood unless its interactions, especially political interactions, with other local units in the same linguistic region are taken into account. A linguistic region however, <u>can</u> be studied without reference to other linguistic regions. Linguistic regions have clearly different caste

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1. Gough, in Schneider and Gough, 1961, pp. 298-442.

systems. The number and size of castes, their occupations, their approximate rank in the hierarchy, differ without reference to each other. They do not differ within a common framework of reference. The local units within a linguistic region differ with reference to each other, especially where they are in direct contact. Political interaction between linguistic regions was not regular and recurrent. When it occurred, it took an unprecedented form, such as imperial domination of one by another. The history of ancient India is full of instances of this kind. The ancient Hindu emperors however did not obliterate the ruling groups of the regions they conquered. Rather, they tried to rule through, or over, the local ruling groups themselves. The later Islamic empires were more centralised than the ancient Hindu empires. They were, however, almost as unsuccessful in displacing local rulers, especially in outlying provinces. Local rulers suffered diminution of power and privileges, and were economically burdened by an obligation to provide tributes and armies for the emperor. But they were rarely deprived of their recognised offices and their territorial jurisdictions. The British domination followed an entirely different pattern. Local rulers were deprived of their traditional territories, though normally allowed to retain offices and, if they were docile, some estates. Those rulers who were not so deprived had to disband their armies and

submit to supervision. British rule, therefore, marks the watershed of political change in all the caste societies of India. Caste systems that passed through this mill (and all of them, in India, did) never again regained their normal, or traditional, form. To a considerable extent, forms of political interaction characteristic of the traditional society persist till today, especially at the local level, in villages, or groups of villages. The basis of political sovereignty, however, has changed. Sovereignty resides formally in the Indian Union, and is backed by a corresponding form of government. The federated units are, at least theoretically, subject to a central government which has its own administration, and, more significantly, which controls the army and the ultimate sanction of force. Caste systems, the regional societies of India, are no longer the only, or even the most important arenas of political interaction, as they used to be. As linguistic regions, or states, they are formally recognised political units within a much wider entity, the Indian State. As caste systems, they have no formal recognition at all.

The period prior to the British empire has been described above as traditional, and the political organisation of caste systems then prevalent is also called traditional. The Islamic and the Hindu empires, however, also belong to this period. These were not coterminous with any caste

system nor with a linguistic region. They are therefore not included under the term "traditional political organisation". On the other hand, they affected caste systems and their political organisation according to the power they exercised over them. Such systems can be said to be less typical of the traditional type, as defined above, than those relatively untouched by outside domination.

A traditional system, therefore, is one in which a linguistic region, having a recognised hierarchy of castes, is ruled by members of one or other of these castes. Such systems existed, with modifications, up to the eighteenth century. With the establishment of the British empire, and the complete dismantling of the political organisation which previously existed, the traditional political systems ceased to exist, though linguistic regions and caste systems persisted.

This brings us to the problem of the thesis, which is, the relation of caste, or caste systems, to forms of political organisation, before the bureaucratic centralisation of the British had made caste politically irrelevant in formal terms. What was the typical political organisation of the typical traditional caste society? We have glimpses of an answer in F.G. Bailey[1] and Eric Miller.[2] We have a more substantial

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1. Bailey 1960, 1963a.
2. Miller, 1954.

if still insufficient indication in Bernard Cohn.[1] In every case, we find a multiplicity of chiefs usually belonging to one caste, spread over a region, and having relatively intense political interaction with each other. Is this dispersal of power among several minor chiefs typical of a caste system, or was it an accidental occurrence in the particular systems studies? Is dispersal of power a direct result of limited communications? In which case, is a caste system and its particular pattern of political interaction possible only in a small scale society, as Bailey[2] contends?

In subsequent chapters, two traditional systems will be examined in detail, with special reference to political interaction within the systems; an attempt will be made to show that there is a necessary, or functional relation between the social system and the type of political organisation. However, neither one can be proved to be prior to the other. Also, other societies, without caste or caste-type stratification, are known historically to have had a similar political organisation, that is, a severalty of chiefdoms, linked by close cultural and kinship ties. We need therfore to examine some of the terms that will be used in this analysis.

Our first major term, or concept, is caste. For

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1. B.S. Cohn, 1959.
2. Bailey, 1963b, pp. 107-124.

present purposes, it is unnecessary to weigh the controversy whether caste is a universal sociological category, or whether it is a cultural category that includes only Indian, or pan-Indian societies. Even if we accept it as a sociologically universal category, for the present we are concerned only with what would then be its Indian sub-category.

In the past two decades of intensive field-work on caste in India, innumerable facts have been put together, and useful concepts been developed. But there has been far less theorising than there was in the pre-empirical phase. The only serious attempts in this direction have been made by Bailey[1] whose main emphasis is still empirical. Because it is so, his explanation of caste is a careful one, separating out the several referents of the term as now used,[2] and using caste in traditional Indian society as a baseline for his definition.

The first referent, caste as varna, is by now generally recognised as being only a formal model. It is not the system on the ground now, nor was it at any period except perhaps a very remote and unverifiable past. The three other referents discussed by Bailey are 1) caste as categories, normally in a linguistic region, but not social

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1. Bailey, 1963a, 1963b.
2. Bailey, 1963b.

strata since, though they are exhaustive and exclusive, "they are not unambiguously groups";[1] 2) caste as associations, exclusive but not exhaustive, since not all members of a caste join it. These are significant as new structural forms of caste; 3) caste as jati, which is "the main sociological referent". I now quote fully Bailey's discussion of caste as jati.

"In order to expound clearly the principles on which it (that is, caste as jati) is based, I must be permitted the gross oversimplification of 'traditional Indian society'. This society was divided into countless small political units, which I shall call 'blocks', because they could be arranged and rearranged to make larger units. While the larger units were segmentary (in the sense that any feudal state is segmentary, in particular in the sense used by Southall)[2], the blocks were organic, relatively stable, and relatively indestructible. Blocks had these characteristics because ritual, political and economic systems reinforced one another and to some extent coincided, and because kinship links did not cross the boundaries of the unit.[3]

"Both these facts are aspects of the caste system, and each block itself constituted a caste system. The population of each block (call it a 'chiefdom') was divided

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1. Ibid, p. 107.
2. Bailey's (1963b) footnote: "Caste and Territory in Malabar", by E. Miller in American Anthropologist, Vol. 56, 1954.
3. Bailey's (1963b) footnote: "Alur Society", by Southall, 1953.

vertically into villages or larger territorial sub-divisions, and horizontally into castes".[1]

This is a definition of the political structure as much as of the caste system of traditional Indian societies. Bailey repeats this definition in a discussion of social change in Orissa, and I quote again, "The older type of caste belongs, if one may put it that way, to a small-scale, non-bureaucratic, political organization - the system operated within a kingdom or chiefdom, where rule was personal and relations more or less face-to-face. Kinship and caste relations came to an end at political boundaries, and these boundaries were culturally marked by differences in custom between two castes which bore the same name. There is an excellent analysis of this system in eighteenth century Malabar by Miller (1954), one which is almost the ideal type of what I mean by the 'older system'."[2]

Bailey's last sentence is, unintentionally, a testimonial for the choice of Kerala as one of my areas of study. But, more seriously, his definition of caste underlines the multiplicity of political units, and their roughly symmetrical, segmentary political interactions. However, he overemphasizes the separateness of these political

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1. Bailey, 1963b, p. 108.
2. Bailey, 1963a, p. 132.

units. When he says there were marked cultural boundaries between such units, we must agree on the basis of several first hand accounts of these (e.g. Kathleen Gough on Kerala).[1] But the need to be culturally demarcated from neighbours arose out of the need to identify the political unit, not because of absence of communication between units. Besides, such cultural differentiation was internal to the linguistic region; it was a variation upon a theme. It is also significant to note that there was, and is, a similar cultural differentiation between different castes within any area, and that such cultural differentiation is not accidental. Units were differentiated by direct reference to their immediate neighbours.

Bailey claims other, more tangible boundaries between units, notably, kinship. In fact, however, kinship links were not totally confined to the block, as we shall see in the Kerala analysis. The higher the caste, the more likely it was to have kinship ties with families of the same caste elsewhere in the linguistic region. (Bailey's caste as category, see pp.16-17) Such ties were occasionally affinal ties, though more often marriage tended to be hypergamous, strengthening the political block. More typically, these ties were

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1. ed. Schneider and Gough, 1961. See page 3.

created by dynastic adoptions which could be made only from the adopter's caste. These may not have occurred very frequently, nor did they always entail political or other interaction. But they emphasised every now and then the existence of a horizontal political layer. This layer had no corporate political functions. But all political positions, (that is, chiefships of varying importance), were held by families belonging to this layer. (In Kerala, the layer consisted roughly of three castes). Therefore I think it is reasonable to talk of a caste system co-terminous with a linguistic region. The block was essentially a political unit, and not, as Bailey says, itself a caste system. Because the block was a political unit, its slice of the regional caste system tended to be marked off from neighbouring slices. In the absence of an administrative system to separate out the block from others, such marking off was effected by cultural differentiation and by hypergamy, and probably by local traditions, ritual observances, and so on.

We have then caste societies, or systems, most clearly demarcated by language (and kinship ties, whether cognatic or affinal, never crossed the linguistic boundary, except for the stray case of marriages forced by political domination from outside. In the latter case no continuing kinship relation as a result of the marriage was recognised).

On the other hand, we have a political organisation which specifically inhibits the development of a caste society into one political unit. There is a ruling caste - which is not in any sense an association - and all political sovereignty resides in members of this caste, again not collectively, but in so far as each has hereditary rights to a certain territorial jurisdiction, and to certain political titles with accompanying rights and duties. The political units in any region are roughly symmetrical, and subject to the same set of rules about the position of chiefs, their rights and duties, and proper and improper interaction with other chiefs in the region; rights and privileges of lesser personages, such as hereditary officials, and of lesser groups, such as the caste or castes which provide warriors; the system of land tenure which supports the differential powers of chiefs, their dependents, and of the warriors. A neighbouring region has often a completely different set of rules about these things, and a separate, unrelated culture.

This, therefore, is the model of the traditional caste society - a region-wide society politically split into blocks. To throw it into relief, we can follow another of Bailey's referents, caste as association. In discussing this he has shown, successfully, how caste is changing in a large scale political system. I quote, "In place of countless

small, relatively isolated, traditional political divisions, there are now emerging a few large political arenas, which in this contest we can take as the States of the Indian Union. Within these States various jatis, which formerly were separated by being in different political systems, are now uniting. What were formerly caste categories are becoming groups".[1] Such a caste group is associational, it is a "competing interest-group, to be categorized with political parties sooner than with status groups".[2] Again, Bailey treats his block, or chiefdom, as a separate political system, parallel to what he earlier called a separate caste system. I hope to show, with material from Kerala and Punjab, that the blocks were not so many political, or caste, systems, that they were rather linked and often interlocking units, or segments, which together constituted a system. Otherwise, he brings out very clearly the difference between traditional and modern caste. The former was characterised by vertical segments, the latter by horizontal ones. Wherever horizontal political segments develop, and vertical segments break up, we would have one kind of structural change. (Another kind would be where vertical segments are incorporated into a

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1. Bailey, 1963b, p. 121.
2. Bailey, ibid, p. 123.

single, centralised system, of which again we have instances in Kerala and Punjab, and also in Maharashtra which is not covered in the present research).

The vertical political units of traditional systems stressed the hierarchy of castes. Competition did not occur between castes within the block, and the vertical relationships, with the ruling, or chiefly family at the top were maintained. The leading family was not assisted in its domination by an organised bureaucracy. Nor was its army an easily controlled instrument of power since soldiers were usually self-equipped, paid in kind (usually land), and they were warriors by hereditary profession and not at the chief's behest. The chief, or leading family, had a traditional and hereditary right to rule, but obviously such a right could not last without hard support. One prop of the chief was the larger estates he owned, giving him an economic advantage over all others in the territory. His patronage was extended to the largest number of clients, with whose support he kept his leading position. The other prop was his caste affiliations. These were primarily kinship ties, including marriage where the vertical unit was not highly developed. They were not associational. They did not entail political interaction as a group. The ruling caste did however exercise a more or less exclusive control over political power, and competition for power was confined to their ranks. Interaction among

chiefs was not directly concerned with the maintenance of caste stratification and control over lower castes. It did, however, have this effect by preserving local hierarchies. By engaging in competition beyond the boundary of the block, chiefs confirmed their own position at the top, barring Brahmins, in the local hierarchy. At the same time, they asserted that they were the political centre in the block. Competitive interaction with other chiefs could only be undertaken when chiefs were the only or the predominant centres of power in their chiefdoms. These blocks, vertically arranged into castes, on the one hand split up a caste society into territorial political units. On the other, they maintained the caste layers, at the regional level by segmentary interaction among members of the ruling caste, at the block, or chiefdom, level by the authority relations of these ruling caste families to their subordinate castes. It is precisely this function of maintaining caste hierarchy that is performed by the dominant caste factions noted in so many parts of rural India at the present time. On this hypothesis, the absence of factions within a dominant caste is a symptom of the low degree of dominance of the caste. The caste hierarchy in such a situation would be blurred, with several castes closely contesting for power and probably for ritual status as well.

It is necessary to differentiate between ruling caste and dominant caste. To speak of a caste being dominant is

to imply that it is in successful competition with other castes. The term is in fact useful in the modern context, as we have seen in Bailey's analysis. If we take Srinivas' definition, "A caste may be said to be 'dominant' when it preponderates numerically over the other castes, and when it also wields preponderant economic and political power. A large and powerful caste group can be more easily dominant if its position in the local caste hierarchy is not too low."[1] That is its ritual position. The dominant caste in this sense was not without significance in traditional societies. Of Mysore, Srinivas tells us, "The council of the dominant caste in the hobli-capital is called a kattemane (house of law), and it settles disputes not only occurring within the capital, but also entertains appeals from councils of every village in the hobli. It normally tries to uphold the authority of local elders".[2] This, despite the present tense used, was the traditional function of the kattemane. It was mainly an administrative function, but not, usually, a political one. It did not exercise sovereignty over territories, nor wield an army. It was a collective entity. The caste, and not its constituent members, dispensed justice. It continued to do so no matter who was the sovereign, at

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1. Srinivas, 1959, quoted from his "The Social System of a Mysore Village", in Village India, edited by McKim Marriott, Chicago, 1955.
2. Srinivas, 1959, p. 16.

least till British times, and often persisted thereafter.

The chiefs in the blocks of traditional caste systems did not constitute a dominant caste, as described above. Rather, they formed a ruling, sovereign stratum, deriving their power from a control of economic resources and independent armies, to some extent from a high ritual position such as Kshatriya, or allied caste. They did not depend upon numbers, nor upon any collective organisation. They did not hold their power vis-à-vis other castes. I therefore call them a ruling caste as distinct from a dominant caste.[1] The characteristics of a ruling caste briefly listed are: hereditary right to rule; (hence) legitimate exercise of power probably supported by Brahmins; fairly high ritual position; hereditary estates, the extent of which determined the minimal strength of individual families; spread usually coinciding with linguistic region; linked to each other by kinship, through adoptions, marriage; without collective organisation of any kind whatever; in mutual competition for power, each being independent of every other; and, finally, deriving strength not from their own numbers, but from the numbers they can call up in armed conflict. In fact, a numerous ruling caste would mean infinitesimal fragmentation of resources and of power, which would weaken it vis-a-vis other castes which might then throw up rival contenders for power. The study of power

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1. B.S. Cohn, 1959. The "little kingdoms" described by Cohn were ruled by chiefs who formed such a ruling caste.

relations in a traditional caste society, therefore, is a study of the activities of members of the ruling caste.

The study of power relations in small-scale societies initiated by "African Political Systems"[1], has been carried forward to a fairly high level. The most theoretical statement of the problem has been made by M.G. Smith both in his essay "On Segmentary Lineage Systems"[2] and in his more recent book, "Government in Zazzau".[3] Very briefly, Smith separates out two distinct axes of government, the segmentary - that is, the political, and the hierarchic - that is, the administrative, where relations of authority hold the system together. All forms of government could be plotted on a graph with these two axes. Thus the Nuer system would fall wholly on the segmentary axis or just a little, above it. Highly centralised states, like wartime Germany fall on the hierarchic axis. Most forms of government would fall somewhere in between.

It will be shown in the present research that it is possible to have a system of political segments that are hierarchically arranged. This would appear to be a contradiction in terms. If they are hierarchically arranged, they cease to be segments. They cannot be in political

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1. Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, 1940.
2. Smith, 1956.
3. Smith, 1960.

competition. Or, if they are competing segments, they cannot be hierarchically arranged. It is possible however to have unequal segments. Each is theoretically independent, and hence a segment. But the balance of power cannot be maintained, and the more powerful segments are able to impose themselves on the less powerful. Such imposition, while hierarchic, is not authoritative. It is not crystallised into an administrative relationship, and is inherently unstable though specific conditions may give it considerable stability.

Another complication facing any attempt at classification arises from the fact that each of these segments has an internal authority structure, and may in addition have internal political segments, such as factions in the ruling family. The levels of segmentation are not related to levels of authority, as they are in, for example, a centralised bureaucratic structure. There, competition for power occurs within the framework of administrative offices. In the case of Kerala we will find that there is no competition for administrative offices. Such offices as there are, are hereditary. As in ruling families, so in office-holding families, competition within the families themselves was minimised. Such competition often merged into the wider competition between recognised political segments. Obviously, here, the administrative axis is not well developed. Nor, however, is the segmentary

axis as neatly developed as in the case of the Nuer,[1] or of the more complex Swat Pathans.[2] We might recall Bailey on the political characteristics of the chiefdoms (see p. 17), where he says "the larger units were segmentary (in the sense that any feudal state is segmentary, in particular in the sense used by Southall)..."

When we use the term 'feudal', we refer to "a mode of social organisation that may recur in diverse forms in differing periods and environments. Medieval European feudalism nevertheless remains the model of all feudal systems as well as the best known".[3] We need therefore to know something about this model if we are to know where we may not apply the term 'feudal' outside the societies of medieval Europe. Southall gives us an abstract model of feudalism, derived from his studies among the Alur. "Perhaps it would be clearer to distinguish between pyramidal social structures and hierarchical power structures. In the pyramidal structure of segmentary societies there is surely a vertical distribution of power, though this may be largely in an upward rather than a downward direction. For example, this may result from

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1. Evans-Pritchard, "The Nuer", Oxford, 1940.
2. Frederik Barth, "Political Leadership among the Swat Pathans", London, 1959.
3. M. Bloch, 1932, p. 203.

conflict between segments of the lowest order, leading to joint action between segments of an ever higher order until an equilibrium is reached. The important point about the powers exercised in this way is that they are virtually of the same type at the several different levels of the pyramidal segmentary structure".[1] This structure Southall contrasts with the hierarchical, or centralised political structure. The definition of the pyramidal structure could, however include the Nuer type where segments are simply clans. Southall does not differentiate conceptually between the pyramidal structure where segments are relatively undifferentiated and the one where segments may be markedly differentiated and where they do not operate as simple building blocks in a series of levels of opposition. The Alur, however, did have differential segments...." the chieflets,... in both a geographical and an ideological sense, radiated out from the major chiefs".[2] The latter structure is obviously more complex than, for example, the Nuer type. Its segments are not only uneven, introducing an extra factor into segmentary, political interaction. They are also to some extent internally centralised.[3] This is so

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1. Southall, 1953, p. 250.
2. Ibid, p. 180.
3. Southall, ibid, p. 237.

among the Alur. It is so, as we shall see, in Kerala. Such a political system, whose segments have a complex internal hierarchy, may not be a half-way house between the simple segmentary structure and the fully centralised state. It needs to be conceptually separated for a proper analysis and not subsumed in a typology whose extremes are the acephalous, segmentary system, and the centralised state. Southall's failure to recognise Alur as a type distinct from ~~both~~ the purely segmentary type, is regrettable, for his material is more useful to social anthropology than is, for example, the historical data about a similar society, supplied, among others, by Marc Bloch. The conceptual tools of history are not uniform, nor universally accepted. Analysis of historical data escapes with difficulty the jargon both of its earlier "mythical charter" days and of its later efforts to become objective history.[1] We need to look at the historians' word on feudalism not so much to gain a conceptual tool, a model, as to know the original feudal society, and to use that itself as a standard of comparison.

Marc Bloch,[2] discussing feudalism of the European variety, finds five significant features. The first is that

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1. Bloch and Bury, discussed later in this chapter.
2. Bloch, 1932.

kinship ties, real or fictitious, are replaced by other ties. Kinship is now confined to the family; it no longer extends to the society and its government. Secondly, prestige is derived not from the control of land, or other property, but from the control of men. This development was however inhibited because the economy was still tied to the land, and it was not possible to support a large class of dependents. The third feature arises out of the first two. In the absence of kinship ties which operate in a small society, or of money which provides a bond unifying more complex societies, there is a contractual relationship, a personal bond, linking lords to subjects. This contractual nature of feudal ties in Europe seems to me to be its distinctive characteristic, separating it from all the comparable Indian societies, and probably from Zazzau,[1] Alur,[2] and other "sophisticated" segmentary societies.

The fourth and fifth features of European feudalism are the system of vassalage and the development of seigniories. Vassalage was the institution established by the feudal contract, where an overlord protected his vassals some of whom held fiefs for services rendered to him, while others originally independent, sought vassalage for protection from

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1. M.G. Smith, 1960.
2. Southall, 1953.

enemies. Usually, fiefs were not legally hereditary, though they tended to become so.

The seigniory, or manor, stood at the centre of the political unit. Earlier, it was itself a large farm. Later, the lord lived off rents from his tenant farmers. The lord supported his own army by distributing fiefs to the men. Here again, we find the contractual basis of European feudalism. Vassals held their estates not by inalienable hereditary right but by virtue of the overlord's consent. To that extent, the overlord exercised genuine control over his vassals-short of authority however, since he was not assisted by an administrative bureaucracy. Heredity, however, was finally accepted informally in France and Germany, and legally in Italy. In Italy only lower fiefs were recognised as hereditary. In Germany, at first only lower fiefs were so recognised, but later all became hereditary. In France, they all became hereditary, "Heredity, however, while it put a seal on the feudal system certainly compromised its very foundations".[1] It provided for the continuity of the estates, and positions, of lords of the system. But it destroyed the contractual basis of feudalism, and in doing so, it weakened the power of the overlord, and altered the nature of overlord-vassal relations. With the development of a cash economy, however,

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1. Bloch, 1932, p. 207.

political centralisation became more effective, first within the vassal territory, and then under the king, largely through the possibility of hiring both soldiers and administrators.

In any comparison outside Europe, we would expect the specific institutions to vary. We would not be surprised if instead of fiefs and vassals we have lesser chiefs who are vassals though not recipients of fiefs. But the three principles of feudalism - the replacement of kinship by other ties as a structural principle, the power derived from control of men (armed followers) rather than mere wealth, and the political contract binding overlords and vassals into a politically effective segment - must exist if we are to describe any system as feudal. In the case of at least one of the regions here studied, (Kerala), the third feature, (the political contract), exists in a very modified form. Vassals acquire their estates, privileges, and titles by hereditary right, and cannot be deprived of these except by conquest - which was rare. At succession, however, every new incumbent had to gain formal recognition from his overlord, and paid him a succession fee. The principle of heredity was more important than the overlord's recognition. The presence of the latter structure, however, might well qualify the Kerala system as belonging in a class with European feudal systems. The Punjab chiefs and vassals correspond more closely to the European pattern insofar as the principle of heredity was incidental

to the formation of the chiefdoms, It was however universally accepted as the almost exclusive method of transmitting chiefly estates.

The importance of heredity in the Hindu systems is one significant divergence from European feudalism. The other is the absence of a king. Most of the feudal states of medieval Europe recognised a king, even if he was not very much more powerful than themselves. Bloch however says little about the role of the king, whether he in any way linked the feudal states together. If so, what was the actual extent of his influence, or power, and how was it exercised? There was no recognised king in Hindu systems. The loose unity of feudal states, or chiefdoms, was here provided by the caste system. The status of chiefs was derived, formally, from caste membership which automatically ruled out the possibility of one pre-eminent king. Status in European feudalism derived from position vis-a-vis the king. The king stood at the apex of the social hierarchy, and status radiated downwards to royal and noble vassals, to lesser vassals, and to dependents. This must bring about a very different set of "foreign" relations. The European kings, acknowledging no equals within their sphere of feudal states, must look for brides and especially for bridegrooms beyond their political frontiers. To maintain their exclusiveness inside their area, they must have some kind of interaction

with equivalent families beyond their area. Political competition might then develop in a wider arena, in addition to the search for spouses. In the Hindu system, chiefs had caste equals across their borders, and occasionally within their borders. They did not have to go outside the region, since the dynastic duty to marry equal or higher, especially for the women, could be performed locally. Status was not linked directly to chiefship but to a caste which was not an exclusively chiefly group. In direct contrast to Europe, local marriages, hypergamous in character, were prefered since they marked off the local chiefdom from its otherwise socially identical neighbours.

There is in Hindu systems not even the germinal centralisation of the feudal societies of Europe.

Marc Bloch again says little about the interactions between feudal states. The church was powerful, and in some ways stood outside and above the feudal states. But it did not impose its authority over them extensively or consistently. Kingship was weakly developed, and was in fact the slight edge of the king over his vassals, but not enough to dominate them. Feudal states, we know, were constantly at war with each other, or against the king. Bloch does say, "Social and economic conditions thus made for decentralization and produced a veritable parceling out of all the powers of the state, such as justice, the right

to coin money, tools and the like".[1] But he makes no reference to dispersal or decentralisation of armed force that must necessarily be a concomitant of the dispersal of the powers of the state. It is this dispersal ("decentralisation" implies a prior centralisation, which may apply to European feudalism, though this is doubtful outside Italy and perhaps southern France, hence the use of "dispersal") resulting in a number of roughly symmetrical political units, or segments, in regular interaction with each other of a kind that in the absence of a central authority, takes the form of recurrent but limited warfare. Systems of this kind are of frequent occurrence in almost all countries. They include medieval European feudal societies, independent Hindu caste societies, the warring states of medieval China and Japan, and several tribal societies in Africa. Without a more detailed comparison of these, it is not possible to extend the term "feudal" to all, or to coin a new term. The use of the term "feudal" for societies outside medieval Europe must take into account the specific and general characteristics of European feudalism.

The dispersal of power, and the accompanying condition

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1. Bloch, 1932, p. 207.

of recurrent warfare, offered tentatively above as an additional characteristic of feudalism in Europe, and in similar (if not feudal) societies elsewhere, is one of the most striking characteristics of traditional Hindu caste societies, as will be shown in the rest of this thesis. It will therefore be fruitful to look at some sociological opinions about the role of conflict in society.

It has been argued by Simmel[1] that conflict has a cohesive role in society. He supports his argument with parallels from individual behaviour and emotions. He does not however consider conflict as a form of interaction that binds opposing groups together as effectively, (if very differently), as relations of cooperation. He considers it rather as a unifying force within each group. Thus, "Enmities not merely prevent gradual disappearance of the boundaries within the society - and for this reason these enmities may be consciously promoted, as guarantee of the existing social constitution - but more than this, the enmities are directly productive sociologically. They give classes and personalities their position toward each other..."[2] Simmel says, pursuant to this, "within the closed circle hostility signifies, as a rule, the severing of relationships,

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1. Simmel, 1904.
2. Simmel, ibid, p. 492.

voluntary isolation, and the avoidance of contact".[1] Hostility, even where it takes the form of avoidance can however only exist where there is contact, though it may be involuntary. To Simmel, therefore, conflict is a kind of interaction limited to outgroups, and absent from in-groups. He concedes that...." sharper antagonism arises on the foundation of community of relationship than between strangers".[2] But then we have two communities instead of the original one.

A different approach to the problem of conflict and its cohesive role is made by Gluckman.[3] To him, regulated conflict has a cathartic value for society. "Conflicts are a part of social life and custom appears to exacerbate these conflicts: but in doing so custom also restrains the conflicts from destroying the wider social order".[4] Or, later, commenting on medieval European history, "I do feel that the principle that in some circumstances civil war can keep a nation united, might be applied more fully than it is".[5] Cross-cutting conflicts contribute to social cohesion, a thesis partly borrowed by Gluckman from T.S. Elliot[6] who was using it as a criterion of "creativeness and

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1. Simmel, ibid, p. 505.
2. Ibid, p. 513.
3. Gluckman, 1963.
4. Ibid, p. 2.
5. Ibid, p. 48.
6. T.S. Eliot "Notes Towards a Definition of Culture," London, 1948.

progress". Gluckman makes out a better case for the cohesive role of conflict than the speculative Simmel, but he too does not see conflict as a positive interaction between two parties, as in itself a social link, or bond, arising out of certain political conditions. To Gluckman, localised or customary conflict contributes to cohesion by preventing wider disruptive conflicts. They are not themselves cohesive relations.

That relationships of conflict can be recurrent and regular and structurally defined we know from both history and anthropology. Such conflict may in extreme cases take the form of war, occuring between distinct political units. We can perhaps generalize Q. Wright's statement on primitive warfare to cover all societies with a small-scale political organization. "War serves to distinguish this group as the centre of social organization".[1] Again, "Intermarriage and the practice of exogamy, peaceful trade and other contacts with neighbours, and ceremonial gatherings tend to amalgamate neighbouring groups into larger but looser units. War tends to counteract this process".[2] War, therefore, is one way in which a political group, or unit, resists merger with another group or groups. Again, we are told, war has an integrative function for the in-group. The wars between

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1. Quincy Wright, 1942, p. 70.
2. Ibid, p. 70.

in-groups, however, are not seen by Wright as the political concomitant, of the growth of affinal, trade, and other contacts.

Obviously not all wars are cohesive in their effects. Whether or not wars have such an effect will depend almost entirely on the nature of the contending parties, and the relationships other than war, that exist between them. In Hans Speier's words, wars should be classified "according to the social definition of the enemy".[1] Speier classifies wars into three kinds, the absolute, the instrumental, and the agonistic, the last of which he calls not 'war' but 'fighting'. Absolute war is resorted to for annihilation of the enemy, and is usually directed against an enemy who is culturally foreign. Instrumental war is fought to gain values that are held by the enemy, and the general mode is to defeat and dominate the enemy, even to preserve him if that is necessary for the acquisition of the values. Wars of colonisation fall into this category. The actual conduct of war, when absolute or instrumental, may not be easily predicted, since strategy is subservient to specific aims.

The third type, agonistic fighting, is not directed to specific aims. I quote at length. "The extreme opposite of the absolute war is the fight waged under conditions of

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1. Hans Speier, 1941, p. 445.

studied equality and under strict observance of rules. Measured in terms of destruction such a fight is highly inefficient and ludicrously ceremonious. However, the agonistic fight, as we know it from ancient Greece and also from other cultures, is not oriented toward the destruction of the enemy...

"Each agonistic fight is a contest between opponents who delight in measuring their strength according to certain rules of the 'game'. The opponents participate in a common culture or respect common cultural values even if they are representatives of different power structures. It is these common bonds which make the contest possible. ....The values (customs, laws, codes of honour, etc.) transcend the conflict. The agonistic fight has the qualities of a play, with its freedom, its rules, and its association from useful action".[1]

Of the three kinds of war, the agonistic fight alone is in any sense an in-group conflict, involving like units the interrelations of which must vary greatly from society to society. It indicates some degree of integration already existing between units, towards which integration it is itself a contribution. We may call it limited or contained warfare, or even structured, or segmentary warfare. It is

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1. Speier, ibid, p. 451.

not necessarily civil war, nor rebellion, both of which imply a political integration, at least at the formal level, of contending parties within one system. It is genuinely war, armed conflict between politically independent units. However, it is, like civil war and rebellion, not disruptive of a social structure. It is in fact a recurrent process, and part of, an existing structure of society. It is itself an aspect of that society, performing various functions in the political sphere. It defines the political unit; it also links political units, in itself, as a form of interaction, and as an adjudicatory process to resolve the recurrent disputes arising between these political units.

The nature of caste, of political systems, and of political conflict, are the ingredients of the hypothesis to be set out below.

In traditional Hindu societies, which are small-scale societies, there is a regional caste stratification, characterised by a dispersal of power among members of the ruling caste, each of whom leads a political unit roughly equal to others, and relations between whom are necessarily relations of conflict and competition. There is a tendency for the conflict to result in modifications in the political balance between the units, and the powerful units become major centres of power, with lesser units clustering around them. There is however no absorption of lesser units into a larger one, and relations of conflict between units,

separately or in clusters, persist. Political power is concentrated in the hands of the ruling caste, and political competition confined to it. The dispersal or power, with its concomitant factionalisation of the ruling caste is a guarantee of the caste hierarchy. The position of each chief vis-a-vis the others is derived from his domination of the vertical strata in his territories. Also, the social equivalence of the chiefs entails the social equivalence of their follower strata, and enables us to speak of the regional society covered by such equivalent chiefs and their chiefdoms as forming one social system.

In other words, territorial fragmentation of horizontal social strata is causally related to the arrangement of these strata into a firm hierarchy.

We shall see in the two examples of traditional Hindu societies studied in this work that we have a territorial fragmentation of castes, that they are hierarchically arranged, that the vertical units are in relations of recurrent conflict, that the conflict is contained within limits by a variety of sanctions, and that the pattern of conflict persists even when the specific causes of conflict have changed. Dispersal of power is the essential political characteristic of the caste system, and is ensured, in addition to the rules of warfare, by laws of inheritance and succession, by the general application of the principle of

heredity which, by inhibiting the development of an administrative system, prevented the emergence of powerful, centralised units which could threaten the political balance and, through it, the caste stratification. A threat to caste stratification was also a threat to ritual values - a point that cannot here be elaborated, but about which much has been said by anthropologists interested in the purity - pollution social and ritual complex. Such a threat, since it affected not just specific social groups but the whole texture of religous and moral beliefs, even, one might add, of a world view, brought into play quite strong sanctions to restrain it. In both the regions studied, we find that a change towards some degree of political centralisation of a regional society did not succeed. The major constant was the caste system, and this, in addition to such factors as lack of communications and local self-sufficiency - and Bailey has specifically stated that the traditional caste system is essentially a small-scale system - was a direct check on political centralisation. The general failure of political centralisation in Hindu societies, even during the periods of imperial expansion in early centuries,[1] is a symptom of the system. Or, in the general parlance of writers in India and England, it was the result of the "evils" of the caste system.

Before going on to a description of the working of two Hindu societies of the traditional, fragmented kind,

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1. Drekmeier, 1962, Basham, 1954, 1958, and others.

mainly from historical material, it is necessary, very briefly, to discuss the relationship of anthropology and history. The recent trend among anthropologists emphasising the value of history to anthropology makes the use of historical data in anthropological analysis quite respectable although such use is nowhere near becoming a part of anthropological convention. Some work has been done on the role of history in the social life of groups, as a part of their traditions and beliefs, and as a charter to legitimise certain social relations.[1] But this kind of history is itself a social fact, and not a source of social facts. It may in fact have some connection with real events, or people, but having been used for a social purpose these facts will have been distorted, or reshaped, or mingled with legend, and can never serve by themselves as a source of evidence about past events.

There are two cogent reasons for using historical data as sources of sociological facts. One is that this is a major way of studying social change. The other reason is that it makes possible the study of extinct societies or extinct social forms, which study is relevant for comparison with some contemporary societies. It is of course indispensable

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1. Cunnison, 1951; Barnes.

for the long-term aim of making out a typology of human societies. Where it is the earlier forms of existing societies that are taken up, as in the present work, the knowledge about the existing society is deepened even where it is not possible to trace exactly the steps by which the transformation occurred. It is not necessarily a study of social change, but it could be a fruitful source of such studies. Evans-Pritchard[1] has pointed out that historical knowledge is deeper, and provides a more varied experimental situation, unlike modern studies of social change which are mainly concerned with the effect of Europeans on tribal and other societies. Conversely, the contemporary study provides a useful perspective for analysis of historical material. Too much however need not be made of this; the historical material is ultimately of fixed quantity. Whatever it lacks in information cannot be filled in any way, and all kinds of variables that must inevitably have affected the structure of that society cannot be accounted for, or a full comparison made with the existing successor society.

The strongest plea for the use of history, though not the first, has come from Evans-Pritchard. He says most social anthropology is concerned with description as is most

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1. Evans Pritchard, 1962.

history; it does not always generalise. "And like us, sociological historians have their models and ideal types to help them represent the nature of the real.... Civitas, feudality, class, capitalism, revolution, are all general abstractions implying an ideal type".[1] Again, "An historical fact [thus] shorn of its unique features escapes also temporality. It is no longer a passing incident, a sort of accident, but is, as it were, taken out of the flux of time and achieves conceptual stability as a sociological proposition".[2] There is therefore no basic difference between the historian and social anthropologist. "The fact that an anthropologist studies people at first-hand and the historian in documents is a technical not a methodological difference".[3] Having eroded the boundaries between the two disciplines, Evans-Pritchard prescribes that "an interpretation on functionalist lines (of the present in terms of the present) and on historical lines (of the past in terms of the present) must somehow be combined...."[4] After his earlier stand in the same essay it seems inconsistent that he should still separate functional from historical interpretation. It would be more logical to say that both

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1. Ibid, p..48.
2. Ibid, p. 49.
3. Ibid, p. 58.
4. Ibid, pp. 61-62.

disciplines must use functional analysis for their different kinds of data. If such a development lies far in the future, we can at present at least claim to be able to make anthropological analyses of historical data which is what the present work purports to be. The theoretical framework is derived from anthropology, and the data is almost entirely historical.

The use of historical data has become feasible relatively recently possibly because social anthropology has only recently concerned itself in a big way with political systems and their workings.

As Evans-Pritchard[1] points out, an important difference between the two disciplines is that history is concerned largely with political events and institutions, while social anthropology in addition concerns itself with kinship and community. In subject matter, therefore, history is more limited than social anthropology. But also it is a major potential contributor to political sociology. Apart from the recent emphasis on political systems, another factor that has brought history to the attention of anthropologists is the extension of investigation to literate societies, where written records are available.

There remains one big problem about the relation of

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1. Evans-Pritchard, ibid, p. 59.

history to social anthropology. What about the theories and concepts of history? How far are they developed? How do they compare with the theoretical development of social anthropology? One could go further and argue the merits of historical analysis (as conceived by professional historians and not by Evans-Pritchard), as opposed to anthropological, or functional, analysis. But that may be premature at the present stage, and is beyond the scope of the present study. We can, however, take a brief look at a few historians' opinions on the purpose of history, and its role as a science. This cannot do full justice to the historians, but it will be useful to know something about what they have to say. We avoid the danger of using their histories and ignoring their theoretical and methodological perspectives.

Some of the problems that historians have faced at the level of theory and methodology are parallel to those that have confronted social anthropologists at various times. I base the following discussion on what Bloch, Carr, Bury, and Collingwood[1] have had to say about history. Obviously, the discussion cannot be exhaustive.

The historians have been as concerned as social anthropologists about whether their discipline is a science

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1. Bloch, 1954; Bury, 1903, 1930; Carr, 1961; Collingwood, 1946.

or an art. They have also looked for causation and had to differentiate it from origins - a search that led to the definite emergence of social anthropology from ethnology. History has also had to face methodological problems that again bring it close to social anthropology. Arising out of the claim that it is a scientific, or, as Bury might say, a rational discipline, how far could interpretation be made objective? How did one check for bias in one's sources, and how important was it to evaluate such bias? Should the approach be one of the clean slate, where the problem is formulated from the material, or was it necessary to commence with a problem? Then, was there a definite difference, a watershed, that separated modern from historical societies, a kind of watershed that has separated social anthropology from sociology?

The specific problems of history relate mainly to its sources and evidence, which is often uneven, and gets scantier as one goes back in time. Historians are also concerned about the role of accident, or what they call the Cleopatra's nose theory. Would history have taken a different course if Cleopatra's nose had been a different shape? This difficulty would seem to arise from the emphasis in history upon events and their temporal sequences, and the lack of emphasis on the casual relations between events. But, as Evans-Pritchard says, "An historical fact... shorn

of its unique features escapes also temporality. It is no longer a passing incident, a sort of accident, but is, as it were, taken out of the flux of time and achieves conceptual stability as a sociological proposition".[1] This is what his "historians-sociologues" try to do. Bury treats historical accident as a mutation which is as important to historical progress as a mutation is to biological evolution. This fits his rigid conception of history as a record of human progress (which he is careful to separate from value judgments of good and bad). Here again the emphasis is on the temporal sequence, to the exclusion of any cross-temporal classification of events. To follow the argument among historians on whether history is a science or an art is like listening in to the parallel argument in social anthropology between Radcliffe-Brown and Evans-Pritchard. Radcliffe-Brown came out for a science of anthropology, and took his general perspectives from the natural sciences, modifying them to suit the material of the social sciences. To Evans-Pritchard, each society was a unique entity, only intuitively understood and therefore not amenable to scientific generalisation. The study of society was therefore an art.

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1. Evans-Pritchard, 1962, see p. 22.

Marc Bloch[1] says history is the science of "men in time". This variable, time alone, separates history from other social sciences. This raises at once the problem of how important time is to explain human activities. To Bloch, knowledge of the past was necessary to an understanding of present beliefs. He does not however care for the "embryogenic obsession", the search for origins, which he says "was put to the service of value judgments". He uses the time factor to localise his historical phenomenon. And such localisation is also made with reference to a "total social situation". To anthropology, time would be one aspect of a "total social situation". Bloch, however, does not make a complete break with classical history, but still calls the discipline a science of "men in time".

For Bury, time is a sufficient criterion for historical studies. In fact it is a theoretical framework in itself, for time is equal to progress. Taking this as his first principle, Bury[2] says, "I cannot imagine the slightest importance in facts or sequences of facts, unless they mean

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1. Bloch, 1954, p. 27., "We have called history the 'science of men'. That is still far too vague. It is necessary to add: 'of men in time'".
2. Bury, 1930, quoted in Introduction by H. Temperley.

something in forms of reason". Reason, which he did not further define (was it common-sense? was it formal logic? was it a set of predetermined premises?) was to him, in effect, the working out of the implications of the idea of progress in all specific research. He exalted this idea into "the great transforming conception which enables history to define her scope".[1]

Collingwood takes roughly the opposite view, following the Italian philosopher B. Croce who considered history an art. History, to Croce, was an intuitive vision of individuality and was therefore art. "Art is [thus] not an activity of the emotions, but a cognitive activity: it is knowledge of the individual. Science, on the contrary, is knowledge of the general: its work is to construct general concepts and to work out the relations between them. Now history is altogether concerned with concrete individual facts".[2] Collingwood cannot however go along with Croce to think intuition is enough for a concrete subject like history. Croce, according to Collingwood, separated history as being radically different from natural sciences, but regarded it as directly related to philosophy. History provided the facts about which philosophy generalised.

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1. Bury, 1903, p. 17.
2. Collingwood, 1946, p. 191.

Though fascinated by Croce's ideas, Collingwood does not quite give up the idea of history as a science. He seems to be Crocian when he equates the work of the historian with that of the novelist.[1] But, when evaluating the use made by any historian of histories written by others, he definitely talks of the "scientific historian".[2]

The controversy is heavily weighted, as in social anthropology, towards acceptance that it is a science, albeit a science that has different techniques from those of the natural sciences. But there has been no body of theory accepted as a whole by historians, and as a result, no canalised controversy over theoretical problems. The pattern is for every historian interested in theory to put forward his own general scheme with little reference to other work in the same area. It is heartening for the holistic-minded anthropologist to read in Bloch[3] that civilisation is not a mechanically arranged game of solitaire; the knowledge of fragments studied by turns, each for its own sake, will never produce the knowledge of the whole (it will not even produce that of the fragments themselves); or to find in Collingwood that the historical imagination should be structural not ornamental.[4] But historians do not generally subscribe to

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1. Ibid, p. 246.
2. Ibid, p. 279.
3. Bloch, 1954, p. 155.
4. Collingwood, 1946, p. 244.

this view. And, more significantly, research hardly ever takes this as its organising principle.

History has had to face problems which did not affect social anthropology too much. The writing of histories has been one of the oldest intellectual pursuits of men. It has also been far from objective. Indeed it never tried to be. A major function of history in earlier times has been to support existing or emerging institutions. It has provided charters of legitimisation to persons of groups in power, such as the churches in medieval Europe, the near legendary kings of ancient India, political parties in some countries, and nationalist groups everywhere. The tremendous backlog of bias is not easy to overcome. In fact, there is a case for not regarding earlier histories as history at all, but rather as self-images of the persons and groups concerned. When Croce says all history is contemporary history, this is what he means. But he gives no hope for the emergence at any time of an objective, scientific history.

Because nearly all literate societies have records of such self-images, or histories, and because these self-images have not been finally and fully relegated to the status of evidence rather than history, the theoretical historian is faced with a welter of material of very uneven value, and therefore full of obstacles to comparison. And unless history can see its way out to comparative studies,

it will remain essentially a descriptive body of knowledge, a collection or unique facts. Further, historians must give up the emphasis on the time factor which makes them classify their facts primarily by the period in which they occurred, rather than by their nature. Time is important only to localise phenomena. Its possible importance to laws of social or historical development is a separate matter, and does not affect its relative unimportance to classification and comparison of social or historical types.

The position that history is a science raises the methodological problem of how to ensure objectivity, indeed of how far one can expect to be objective. Scepticism on this matter is as great among historians as it is among social anthropologists. In both cases, there has been a demand for a study of the academics themselves. Among anthropologists, an extreme statement is made by Pocock[1] who thinks that even the direct translation of vernacular texts into English imports a cultural bias into it. Less extremely, Evans-Pritchard says of historians and social anthropologists that both "are trying to do the same thing, to translate one set of ideas into terms of another, their own, [illegible], so that they may become intelligible, and they employ

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1. Pocock, D. "Social Anthropology", London and New York, 1961.

similar means to that end".[1] Carr, for history, says that the facts of history are "refracted through the mind of the recorder" and his injunction amounts to "know your historian". Colourfully, he says, "When you read a work of history, always listen out for the buzzing. If you can detect none, either you are tone deaf or your historian is a dull dog".[2] He also says that "the historian will get the kind of facts he wants". This is almost exactly the danger pointed out to the field anthropologist and one that we cannot say has been overcome. The most obvious example of a failure of this kind is the widespread notion among anthropologists that social change in tribal and peasant societies is always a consequence of the impact of the west. Often this impact is so remote that it is only one element in a set of antecedent conditions, and it may not even be that. The impact, if any, may become effective via other societies, and not directly. But the notion, originating from the close connection between social anthropology and colonial administration persists.

All the historians under review here agree that there is a bias, latent or overt, in historical work. Only Bloch seems to think that it is possible, with sufficient care and

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1. Evans-Pritchard, 1962, p. 58.
2. Carr, 1961, p. 18.

discipline, to overcome bias.

There is the more technical problem of evaluating bias in the raw materials of research, and in all earlier histories. Bloch,[1] the most insistently scientific of the historians, looks at historical evidence in the way an anthropologist evaluates his informant's bias. He thinks that on the one hand allowances must be made for falsehoods, distortion, and hidden motives in the determination of facts, on the other that such falsehoods, distortion and motives are themselves legitimate objects of study, and throw light upon the conditions in which they occurred.

Bloch also has views on the choice of subject of research. He thinks it is necessary to select subject matter, and to make a purposeful selection. To avoid selection and to take the facts as they come is to obtain "a purely superficial order of contemporaneousness". Selection implies abstraction, or theoretical orientation, and without this history cannot become a science.[2] He stresses the need to see a civilization as a whole, but he also insists that the historian must focus on the particular problem selected from its related phenomena.[3] Such selected problems should then be expanded to make cross-temporal comparisons.

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1. Bloch, 1954, pp. 90-110.
2. Ibid, p. 147.
3. Ibid, pp. 155-156.

A major problem in history is that of causation. Social anthropology gave up the search for causes as antecedent conditions and concentrated on the interrelations of phenomena, or their functions within a social system. Bloch comments on history's "embryogenic obsession" and the confusion over the search for origins.[1] Origins were interpreted indiscriminately as either causes, or as beginnings, and were generally used to support value judgments, Bloch does not rule out the need for studying origins. But he wants to make such studies more precise.

Bloch rejects any first cause of human institutions. But he does not reject the idea of causes. To him, all antecedent events of a fact may be classified according to specifity. The most general antecedents are only implicit in a situation. More specific antecedents are the causes of any event or fact. Causes shade off into conditions. This is a useful way to study any particular phenomenon, a shorthand guide to empirical research, and a de-reification of cause. But Bloch cannot quite give up the idea of a cause, and he goes on to say, "Historical facts are, in essence, psychological facts".[2] Or, speaking of the spread of the Black Death, he attributes it to "certain social - and,

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1. Ibid, p. 30.
2. Ibid, p. 194.

therefore in their underlying nature, mental - conditions..."[1] He in fact postulates human nature as a prime cause-cum-condition of historical and social facts. This is a kind of determinism rejected completely by Bury who prefers to explain phenomena as the result of accidental mutations. Carr rejects it too. He also rejects accidental causes: he thinks history must look for rational causes (functions?).

The continuing search for causes in history is an aspect of what could be called - and conventional historians will object to this - the temporal obsession. The constant emphasis on the time scale requires every historian to date his material in relation to an earlier period, and a theoretical justification is put forward that the earlier period is relevant also to know the causes (or perhaps pre-conditions) of one's research.

Strong pleas are made by historians to make history more sociological. And from anthropologists we hear that social (and for some anthropologists cultural) anthropology should become more historical. It is too early to say whether there will be a rapprochement between the two disciplines in which the boundaries will blur or disappear. For the present, standing on the anthropological side of the

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1. Ibid, p. 194.

fence, we can enlarge our empirical fields almost endlessly if we include historical materials where these are available. And we enrich theoretical insights by such research, for we fill in the enormous gap between the small-scale tribal societies and the large-scale modern societies which make up the stuff of present-day field research. The "discovery" of the peasant communities which were units of a large-scale society seemed to fill the gap, and we heard about a continuum of social types.[1] But the enormous number of social types directly antecedent to modern large-scale societies (most notable perhaps are feudal societies of medieval Europe) can only be known historically. Theoretically, these may prove to be more correctly intermediate types in the continuum, since it is not simply the scale of social interactions, or size of a community, that is relevant - a problem that always looms large with the field anthropologist- but the kind and complexity of these interactions.

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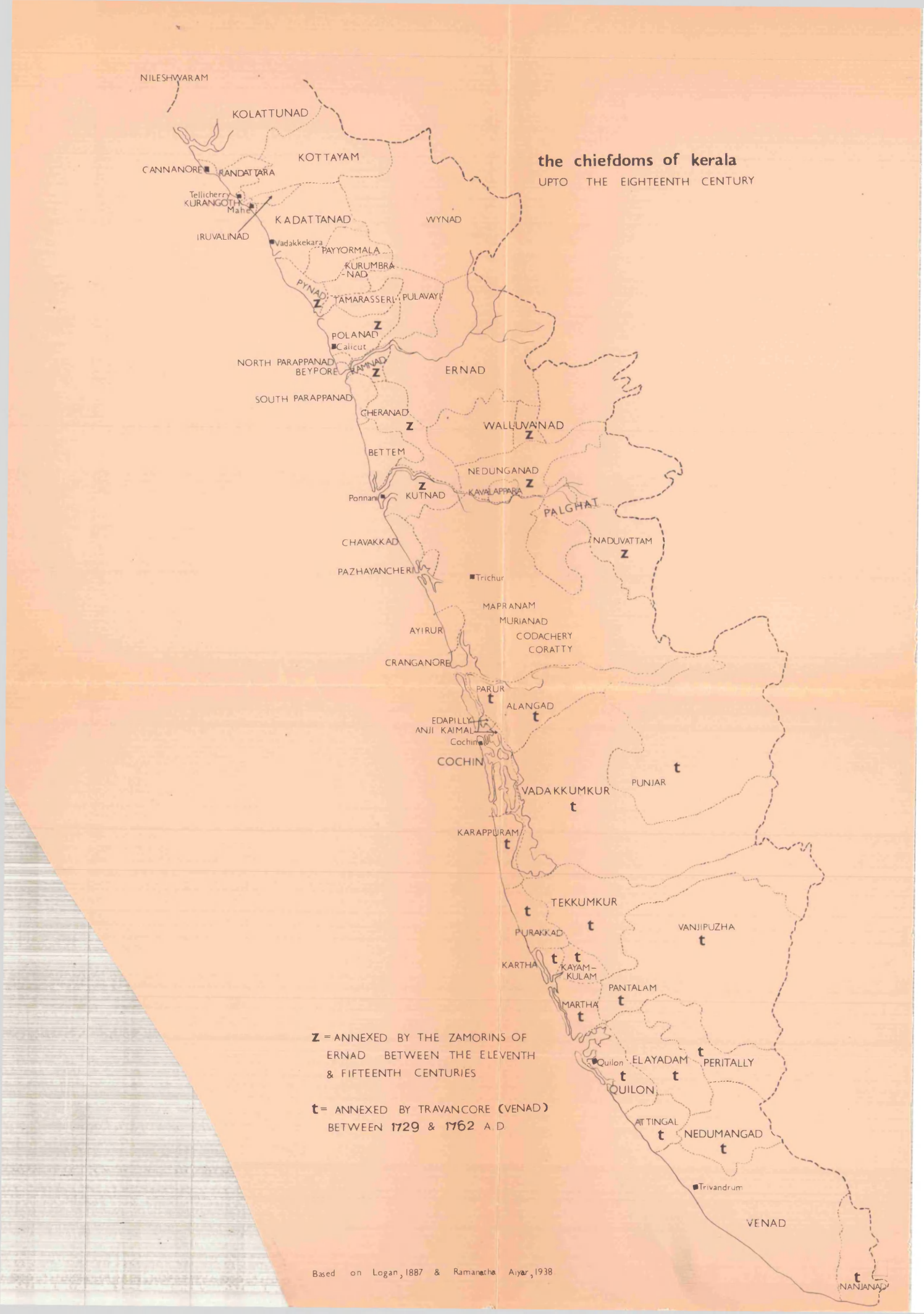
1. Redfield, "The Primitive World and its Transformations", Cornell University, 1953; "The Little Community", Chicago, 1955.


the chiefdoms of kerala
UPTO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
NILESHWARAM
KOLATTUNAD
KOTTAYAM
CANNANORE
RANDATTARA
Tellicherry
KURANGOTH
Mahe
KADATTANAD
WYNAD
IRUVALINAD
Vadakkekara
PAYYORMALA
KURUMBRA -NAD
PYNAD
Z
TAMARASSERI
PULAVAYI
POLANAD
Calicut
NORTH PARAPPANAD
BEYPORE
KAMNAD
ERNAD
SOUTH PARAPPANAD
CHERANAD
WALLUVANAD
BETTEM
NEDUNGANAD
KUTNAD
KAVALAPPARA
Ponnani
PALGHAT
CHAVAKKAD
NADUVATTAM
PAZHAYANCHERI
Trichur
MAPRANAM
MURIANAD
AYIRUR
CODACHERY
CORATTY
CRANGANORE
PARUR
t
ALANGAD
EDAPILLY
ANJI KAIMAL
Cochin
COCHIN
PUNJAR
VADAKKUMKUR
KARAPPURAM
TEKKUMKUR
PURAKKAD
VANJIPUZHA
KARTHA
KAYAM-KULAM
PANTALAM
MARTHA
Quilon
ELAYADAM
PERITALLY
QUILON
ATTINGAL
NEDUMANGAD
Trivandrum
VENAD
NANJANAD
Z = ANNEXED BY THE ZAMORINS OF ERNAD BETWEEN THE ELEVENTH & FIFTEENTH CENTURIES
t = ANNEXED BY TRAVANCORE (VENAD) BETWEEN 1729 & 1762 A.D.
Based on Logan, 1887 & Ramanatha Aiyar, 1938

# CHAPTER II

## THE CHIEFDOMS OF KERALA

The first part of this chapter is an introduction to Kerala, being a brief description of its topography and ecology, its economy over the period covered in the present analysis, caste and whether we can speak of a Kerala caste system, systems of land tenure, laws of inheritance and succession. The second part describes the chiefdoms of Kerala from approximately the ninth to the early eighteenth century. Political interactions of the chiefdoms, their internal government, major rituals involving some of the more powerful chiefs, and political centralisation of southern Kerala during the eighteenth century, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Kerala is situated on the south-western extremity of the southern Indian peninsula. It lies roughly between latitudes 9' and 12', and longitudes 75' and 77'. It is separated from the wide eastern plains by the Western Ghats which kept Kerala isolated from the mainstream of south Indian historical development. We would expect to find here a society and polity unaffected by the north-based Islamic empires, up to the time of British annexation in 1792. The model that emerges from the Kerala material provides a viable ideal type of an independent Hindu caste society.

Kerala can be divided into three geographical regions;

the narrow coastal plain where rice was grown, with coconuts in the more sandy tracts, the foothills of the Ghats which were rich in pepper, and the inaccessible mountainous interior. Communications in the coastal region consisted largely of river and inland waterway traffic. In the interior, communications were more difficult. The annual rainfall is heavy, and neither rice nor pepper cultivation require irrigation. "The difficulty of communications and the lack of a centrally organised irrigation system may have been connected with the fact that Kerala had no regular land tax until the 1730s".[1] The absence of a system of regular taxation is in its turn bound up with a political system characterised by a dispersal of power at every level. By contrast, the east coast has been the home of extensive southern empires, with a high degree of political centralisation.

In order not to give undue weight to the ecological factor, it is important to remember that though the east coast, like the Gangetic plain, made political centralisation a possibility, in fact in none of these regions did the pattern of dispersed power, which it is here contended is a concomitant of traditional caste systems, give way to a fully centralised system. The Hindu empires, from the Mauryas

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1. Schneider and Gough, 1961, p. 302.

to the Marathas under Shivaji, invariably reverted to a system of dispersed power. This reversion was not a process of decentralization or disintegration, as it was a failure of the process of centralisation to displace the old system. In other words, the empires could not succeed because they went against the grain of the caste system. Ecology alone does not explain the persistence of systems of dispersed power.

Ecology does however explain local forms of such systems, though the actual relationship is a little obscure. Thus, in Kerala we find that the narrow coastal plain widens out to 70 miles in central Kerala, at Palghat and Nilambur.[1] The large chiefdoms ruled by families of the Samanthan caste were all located here. The chiefdoms ruled by Kshatriya families were almost always located on the coast, and were much smaller in extent. The correlation of size of chiefdom, caste of the chiefs, and geographical location is too marked to be accidental. Since overseas trade goes back to very early times - Kerala was known to the Romans - the coastal chiefdoms may have acquired a higher caste status. However, even the oldest traditions of Kerala do not mention this.

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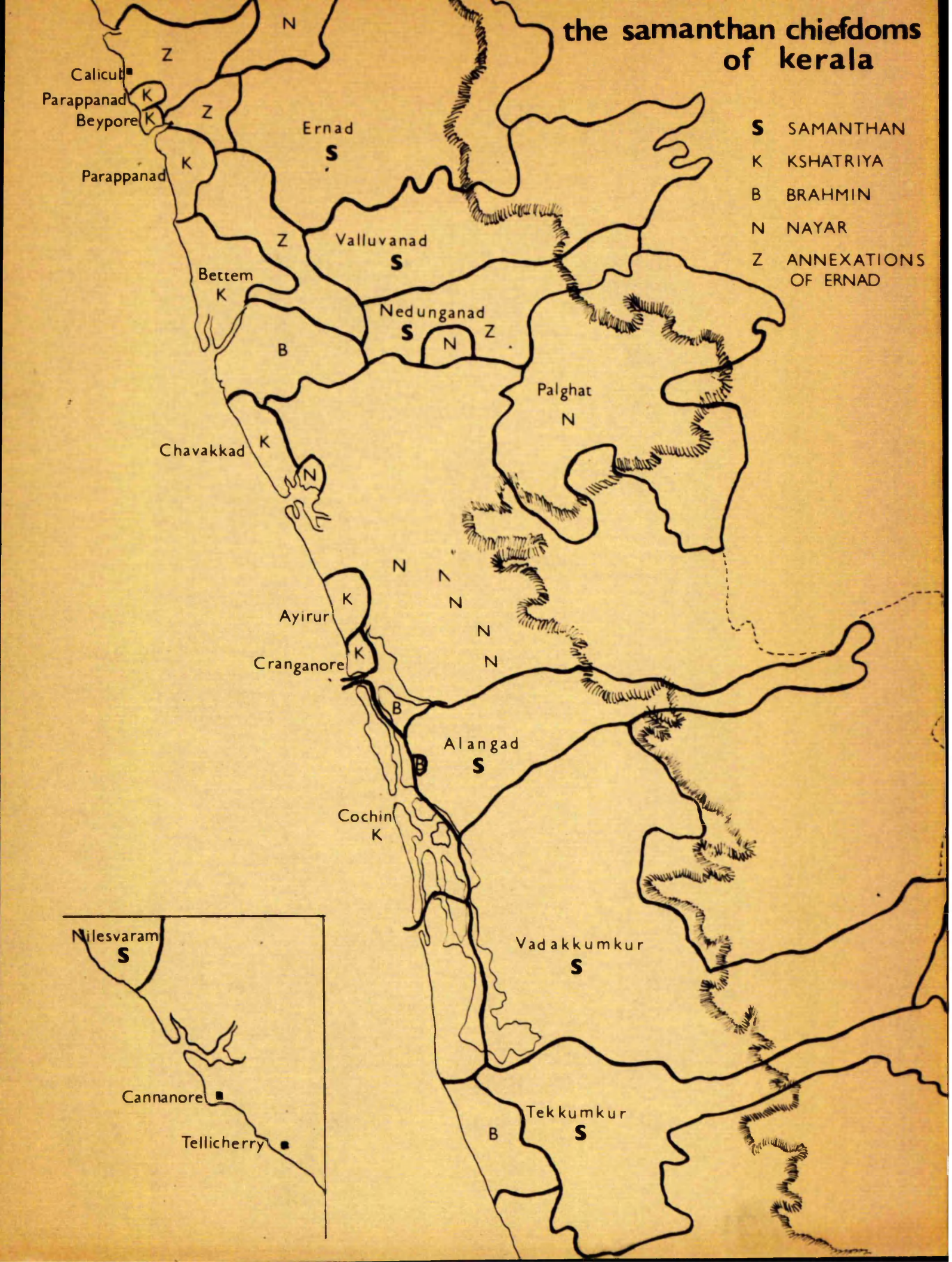
1. Innes, 1908, p.1.


the samanthan chiefdoms of kerala
S SAMANTHAN
K KSHATRIYA
B BRAHMIN
N NAYAR
Z ANNEXATIONS OF ERNAD
Calicut
Parappanad
Beypore
Parappanad
Ernad
S
Valluvanad
S
Bettem
K
Nedunganad
S
Palghat
N
Chavakkad
Ayirur
Cranganore
Alangad
S
Cochin
K
Nilesvaram
S
Cannanore
Tellicherry
Vadakkumkur
S
Tekkumkur
S

The economic advantages of the coastal chiefdoms may account for their smaller size, compared to the inland chiefdoms. These could have made the smaller chiefdoms a viable political unit. Or competition may have been more acute, causing segmentation of the chiefdoms. By the time of the first records, there is an established pattern of coastal Kshatriya chiefdoms, and Samanthan chiefdoms in the wide interior region of central Kerala.

The economy of Kerala was basically agricultural, with local self-sufficiency in the major food crop, rice. There was however a regional and economic diversification in the production of spices, particularly pepper, and in their export overseas. Pepper was grown in the low-lying hills of the interior. It was brought down to the coast and carried from there in the ships of Middle Eastern merchants till the sixteenth century, and thereafter in European ships, to overseas markets. The regional specialisation of pepper cultivation forced economic interdependence on the chiefs of the interior and the coast. The existence of several chiefs in both kinds of regions introduced a strong element of conflict and competition. The breaking out of the Samanthan chief of inland Ernad towards the coast, which dominates the history of central Kerala for four or five centuries prior to the arrival of the Portuguese, was mainly an attempt to acquire a coastal outlet rather than to sell

in another chief's territory. In Chapter III, we shall see that conflict between the chiefdoms was not overtly economic, especially before the advent of the Portuguese. The economic diversification, clearly reflected in the caste status of the chiefs (Samanthans versus Kshatriyas), forced upon them a close involvement of interests. Conflict between them was not therefore a formal expression of the equality of self-sufficient political units, or segments. Wars were fought for real gains of power.

The development of trade did not however substantially alter the social and political system. The trade was carried on by Moors from the Middle East, Christians who originated some centuries earlier than the Moors, and Jews, who also came before the Moors. They lived in the coastal cities, and the Moors at least never owned land till the eighteenth century. The Hindu castes continued to follow their traditional occupations,based on agriculture, while the chiefs taxed the trade and thus strengthened their position in their own chiefdoms.

At the same time, the formal element was also present at least at the time when the Portuguese first arrived. One of their earlier writers wrote that "all the kings of Calicut when newly come to power, had the custom of entering Cochin and depriving the King of his State and taking possession of it and afterwards they restored it to him again for life. The King of Calicut observed this as a law, and the King of

Cochin used to give him a tribute of elephants, and so he returned to Calicut. And the King of Cochin could not coin money, nor roof his house with tiles, under pain of losing his state".[1]

The chiefs were themselves a part of this essentially agricultural society, and continued to be so until they were pensioned off by the British. Trade however provided them with additional resources, differentiating them from powerful landowners in their territories, and enabling them to concentrate on their rivals in other territories. It was the successful trade monopoly of the eighteenth century Travancore chiefs that enabled them to implement a policy of political centralisation.

The caste system of parts of Kerala has been described by anthropologists.[2] Information on Kerala castes is also available in official censuses upto 1941. This factual material is difficult to handle, partly because of its unevenness, and partly because of its quantity, especially in the censuses. There is a ready-made model of the caste system of Kerala in a Malayalam text, the Jatinirnayan.[3] This model, locally recognised, is an important indication that there is such a thing as a Kerala caste system, and not

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1. Barbosa, 1866. Barbosa wrote in 1520.
2. Gough, 1950, 1952, 1959, 1961; Miller, 1950, 1954.
3. Quoted in Ananthakrishna Iyer, 1925, p. 90.

a collection of local caste systems, as argued by Bailey.[1] The Jatinirnayan model is not accurate, but it is a convenient shorthand introduction to the caste system of Kerala. It ignores detailed differences of caste as among the culturally distinct areas of Kerala. "The political systems - and consequently the internal caste divisions of the Nayars and the forms of their kinship system - differed in these three areas". That is, in north, central, and southern Kerala.[2] I deliberately use this model, for various reasons. The perspective here is the whole of Kerala, and not any one part of it. Then, the categorisation of castes in this model underlines the fact that though caste categories may have been largely cultural phenomena, indicating a shared value system and not interaction, they recognised a common social boundary. This recognition was a crucial determinant of potential interaction, and contained an indication of the direction in which changes could occur. Even if the potential interactions were not exploited in a stable system, their latent existence is not without sociological significance. The Jatinirnayan classifies all Kerala castes into six broad groups. The first are the Nambudiris and other Brahmin castes, adding up to ten divisions. The second group are the

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1. Bailey, 1963a, p. 108.
2. Gough and Schneider, 1961, p. 305.

Antharalajati, consisting of twelve divisions of temple servants. The temple servant castes are intermediate in ritual status between the Brahmins and the third group, the Nayars. There are fourteen divisions of high status Nayars, and four of low status. Below them come the Kammalans, or artisan castes, of which there are six divisions. The fifth group of castes of which there are ten include low polluting castes whose occupations range from toddy tapping and agricultural labour to astrology. The last, and lowest, group are the Chandalans, of which four castes live in the plains, and four live in the mountains. They include castes that convey pollution to higher castes even if they are only seen.

The Jatinirnayan model surprisingly omits two of the most important castes of Kerala, the Kshatriyas and the Samanthans. These are and perhaps have always been numerically small, but almost all the major chiefs of Kerala belonged to one of these two castes. Ananthakrishna Iyer who does not give the date or other details about the Jatinirnayan rectifies this model. He places the Kshatriyas between the Brahmins and the Antharalajati, and includes the Samanthans in the Antharalajati, just above the Nayars. The work of anthropologists in parts of central and north Kerala[1] bears

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1. Gough, Miller.

out the general validity of the model presented above. We are not here concerned with details about the forms of purity-pollution avoidance between castes, nor with the detail of traditional caste occupations, especially of the lower specialist castes. The castes we are interested in are those which were significant to political interaction.

The economy of Kerala, we saw earlier, was basically agricultural. There were several kinds of land tenure, north Kerala alone recognising a hundred kinds.[1] Elsewhere three main kinds of tenure were recognised. These closely supported the stratification of castes on the accepted ritual scale. The tenures were known as janmam, (or ownership), kanam (or long lease), and verumpattam (or short sub-lease for cultivation).

A janmam holding was normally the largest in a village. It might include the whole village. It was a freehold estate, exempt from taxation by any chief of the district. An exception to this rule occurred in Travancore. The Cochin ruling family owned estates in Travancore territory, and these were liable to a tax known as rajabhogam.[2] This was in fact a political tax, to prevent any claims of sovereignty by Cochin over its estates in Travancore

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1. Gough, 1950.
2. Nagam Aiya, 1906.

jurisdiction. No tax was levied on Brahmin owners, on temples, or on Kshatriyas and Samanthans who did not have political offices elsewhere.

Traditionally, janmams were said to belong exclusively to Nambudiri Brahmins. A strong tradition exists that Kerala was raised out of the sea by an ancient mythical hero of Hindu mythology, Parasurama. He is said to have brought in the Nambudiris and to have divided Kerala among them.[1] Although Nambudiris were considerable janmis, even after the Mysorean invasion had caused many of them to lose their lands to tenants and to the Muslim Moplahs, they were never the exclusive owners of land in Kerala. The temple estates which were also usually large, though managed directly by Brahmins, were subject to a general supervision by chiefs. In chapter III, we shall see that cheifs frequently battled over rights of supervision, or koyma, in temples.

Janmams were also held by Kshatriyas, Samanthans, and Nayars of high status, and more rarely by the Ambalavasis, or temple servants. Usually, each village had one major janmi family which also exercised the functions of village headman.[2]

A janmam holding was inalienable in theory. It could however be lost by being donated to a temple, to a

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1. Innes, 1908, p. 40.
2. Miller, 1950.

friend, or to a Sudra, that is Nayar, wife, or it might be dissipated.[1] Selling a janmam was possible but it was a long process lasting several years, and a janmi could at any time call off the sale, even after some instalments of the price had been paid. It was always shameful to sell a janmam.[2]

Each estate had attached to it a number of serfs of the untouchable castes of Cherumas or Parayans. A janmi could have his estates cultivated by these serfs. Usually, he leased all or part of his lands to long term tenants on a kanam tenure, He could lease on annual tenures to small cultivators, but this was usually done by the kanam tenants.

Kanam tenants held their leases nominally for twelve years, at the end of which they had to be renewed. Before the British, such renewal was almost obligatory on the janmi. British law tended to interpret the janmi-kanakkaran relation as a contractual one, and therefore easily terminable at the end of the twelve years. Kanakkarans were usually Nayars, who were warriors by profession. They were liable to be called up by the village headman to go to war on behalf of the local chief. Warring and cultivation could be followed by the same men if wars were always seasonal. This does not seem to have been the case. The only time wars

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1. Slater, Vol. 1, 1918.
2. Miller, 1950.

were halted were during the monsoons, and at times of annual or other ritual festivals. The Nayar kanakkaran therefore did not cultivate his lease himself. He sub-leased the land to small cultivators of a lower caste on an annual lease.

A kanam tenure involved no regular annual rent. Initially the kanakkaran paid a sum of money as a kind of mortgage to the janmi. At the twelve-yearly renewal, he paid some dues to the janmi.

The annual or verumpattam lessee paid an annual rent, largely in produce. The verumpattamdars were usually of the toddy tapping caste, or, possibly, Moplahs. The latter however are largely post-Tippu.

The several varieties found within each of these three tenures[1] are again dispensable information. What is of interest is the correlation of caste to tenure; the more valuable the tenure, the higher the caste of the holder.

The system performed some useful functions. It linked the cash economy of the coast to the barter system of the interior.[2] The kanam payment to the janmi was in cash. Nayar soldiers were paid small cash amounts by their chiefs in addition to their rice allowance, and the kanam

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1. Detailed in Logan, 1887; Innes, 1908; Buchanan, 1807; Nagam Aiya, 1906.
2. Gough, 1952, pp. 75-76.

amounts must have come from this. The cultivators, selling some of their crops (spices) to the coast, must also have had their own access to cash. Another function of the system was that it released the Nayars for military service.[1] The separation of ownership from control, and of control from military service and its hazards, ensured the stability of an essentially agricultural economy. The warriors were economically provided for with a minimum involvement in the agricultural sector. It is important to remember that most Hindu caste societies had military castes, but their systems of land tenure did not provide the near-perfect fit that Kerala did between the economic and political functions of castes.

The large religious tenures of Kerala belong to the landowning, non-political sector in the economy. On the one hand, they were exempt from war by ritual prescription, although they were never powerful enough to always keep outside or above the system of warring relations among the chiefdoms. Moral and ritual sanctions, supported by the considerable agricultural wealth of both the temples and the Brahmins, gave to these tenures a special position in

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1. Ibid.

relation both to the chiefs who were of lower ritual status, and to the general population. Temple tenures were a frequent cause of conflict among chiefs. The disputes grew about the melkoyma, that is, the right of general supervision. Two other kinds of koyma right were recognised, the aga koyma or supervision of temple ceremonial, and the pura koyma or management of the temple properties. These koyma rights could be granted separately to different chiefs at the same time. An influential Brahmin manager could grant them en bloc to a chief other than the one in whose territory the temple stood.[1] At the village level, managerial rights over temples were known as urayma. These were usually associated with a janmam holding. The village janmi who was also usually the headman, or desavaazhi, therefore enjoyed a ritual office that supported his local authority. Urayma rights were transferable in exactly the same way as other janmam rights. A deed of sale, dated 1523 A.D., transfers to the buyer janmi rights in a desam (village), along with the desadhipatyam (authority over desam), the ambalam (temple), the ambalappadi urayma (rights in temple management), the lands of the devaswam ("wealth of the gods"), the Cheruma

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1. Miller, 1950.

serfs attached to the devaswam, and the lands and the slaves of the selling family.[1] Nearly three hundred years later, in 1810, a Palghat deed refers to the sale of a desam, its desadhipatyam, two temples, the ambalappadi urayma and "other temple dignities", lands, slaves, retainers, the dues of a desavazhi, and full rights in the desam.[2]

Some of the temples performed a sanctuarial function. The sanketam,[3] or estate, of Sucindram in the far south was used during the eighteenth century as a refuge by an Attingal princess from her neighbouring enemy the chief of Kayamkulam.[4] The people of Nanjanad in its vicinity also sheltered here during an invasion in 1719 by the Nayaks of the East Coast.[5] In the latter case, the sanctuary was not respected.[6] The sanketams have been compared to the churches of medieval Europe,[7] but the latter were much more powerful than the sanketams. The church organisation was more extensive than the several principalities it covered, it had an independent administration, and had a high degree of centralisation. The medieval sanctuaries were more

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1. Logan, Vol.II, deed no. 9.
2. Ibid, deed no. 49.
3. Gundert, 1872. One meaning of sanketam is given as, "An asylum, holy refuge exempt from war and profanation".
4. Pillay, 1953, p. 263.
5. Ibid, p. 259.
6. Ibid, p. 263.
7. Gough, 1961.

effective than the Kerala sanketams.

A sanketam has been defined as "the territorial extent of the independent jurisdiction, spiritual and temporal, of a pagoda (kshetra sanketam) or of a Brahmin community in a particular locality (grama sanketam) within the limits of which no acts calculated to pollute the temple or the community were permitted by immemorial customs".[1] Another definition says it is "a religious corporation. The lands belonging to a temple were under the control of a separately constituted body of members, who in olden days wielded unlimited powers within their jurisdiction. Even the king had no control over these corporations except in a general way. The lands belonging to the temples and managed by the Yogams were also exempt from the payment of certain taxes and were under a special form of tenure".[2]

The sanketams therefore had both a ritual status and an independent political status vis-a-vis chiefs, though their yogams were not the all-powerful despots in the sanketam, as implied in the second definition.

In the early nineteenth century, Travancore and Cochin states brought to British arbitration a dispute over the status and functions of the sanketams of Elankunnapuzha

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1. Pillay, 1953, quoted on pp. 259-260, from Travancore Annual Report of Epigraphy, Vol.3.
2. Ibid, quoted on p. 260, from Travancore Archaeological Series, V.

and Annamanada temples. Travancore claimed that they were independent territories. Cochin claimed they could act independently only on questions of pollution. The award went in favour of Cochin. This could however have been a politic measure, or it may have been a cosequence of the English idea of proper government, rather than a confirmation of the traditional rights of sanketams.

Historical events indicate that there was no uniformity in the powers enjoyed by the temple yogams. These seem to have varied according to immediate political circumstances. If the local chiefs were weak, as in Travancore upto the eighteenth century, the yogams were completely independent though they still did not have any formal political status. Where a sanketam was strategically situated on the frontier of a chiefdom, like Trichur in relation to Cochin to which it was traditionally subordinate, its managing Brahmins could side with their chief's enemies. The Trichur Brahmins continuously aided Cochin's chief enemy the Zamorin, and it was only after 1760 that Cochin punished them by confiscating their estates.[1] Generally the sanketams were not involved in the disputes of chiefs, where the jurisdiction of chiefs was not in doubt.

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1. A. Govinda Wariar, 1928.

The relative detachment of most sanketams from political conflict helped to preseve their large estates from dismemberment by conquest. Chiefly endowments and public contribution added to their wealth and made them into storehouses of the economic surplus of the region. The recurring wars over rights of supervision over temples were overtly fought for ritual prestige, but the wealth of the temples could hardly be irrelevant, although we have no evidence of how the chiefs tapped the wealth of the temples under their control.

The laws of inheritance, and especially of succession affected the political system. We shall see later that they provided a fruitful source of conflict. Here, a brief outline is given of the practices of the more important castes.

The laws of inheritance varied from caste to caste and from region to region. We shall see later, in this chapter and the next, how the laws of inheritance and succession affected the political system. The matrilineal principle was followed by all the ruling castes - the Kshatriyas, the Samanthans, and the Nayars - as well as by the lower sub-castes of Nayars who were the traditional warriors. The polluting castes, from toddy-tappers down, varied from patrilineal to matrilineal in different parts of Kerala. We are not concerned with these castes as they did not participate directly in the political system.

Succession among the ruling castes went laterally through brothers, and then descended to the sisters' sons. Positions inherited were chiefly titles, if any, held by the family. In a non-chiefly family, the headship of the joint family so descended. Where the family included the descendants of several women, lateral succession went by seniority of the descendant's age and not by that of his mother. Apart from the recognised titles which were held by individual males, the joint family property was held in equal right by all members of the family. The property was normally both inalienable and impartible. Partition and transfer of the property could be affected by the mutual consent of all members of the family. Social consensus was against both partition and transfer. Partition among land-owning Nayars was inevitable when the family expanded, but however much a chiefly family expanded, it was not expected to make a complete partition. Its branches, or segments, might divide the property and build separate residences. But chiefly titles and the properties attached to these must still be shared by all segments. The division of these was generally regarded as disgraceful.

In central Kerala, the matrilineal castes also had matrilocal marriage, with the husband living with, or visiting his wife in her natal home. The family unit consisted of brothers, sisters, and the children of the latter. In

northern Kerala, property rights descended through sisters' sons, but on marriage a woman usually went to live in a separate home with her husband. Her children could inherit from him only his self-acquired property. His share of ancestral property went to his sisters' sons. The conflict latent in the recognition of both a man's sons and his sisters' sons often flared up in the north Kerala chiefdoms. The rules of succession and inheritance followed in southern Kerala in the eighteenth century were matrilineal. There is some doubt about the rules followed in earlier centuries, when it is believed that Tamil influence was strong and that possibly rules of inheritance and succession were patrilineal.

The Nambudiri Brahmins- not a ruling caste, as we have seen, but a powerful one in both ritual and economic spheres, were patrilineal. They at the same time practised primogeniture. The problem of younger sons was solved by forbidding them to make legal marriages. The eldest alone married a Nambudiri girl, and so provided legal heirs to the family property. Younger sons were maintained by the eldest. As for marriage, they contracted sambandham unions with women of the matrilineal castes. The children of these unions inherited from the mother, and were in no way a legal liability to their Nambudiri father.[1] Such hypergamous

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1. Detailed in Schneider and Gough, 1961, pp. 319-320.

unions were sought after partly for status reasons by the matrilineal castes. They were also sought after because chiefly families could in this way avoid commitment to ritual equality with fellow caste members, with many of whom they might be involved in bitter political competition. At the same time, they reinforced the solidarity of the chiefdom, or the "block".[1] Hypergamous marriages between Brahmins and the matrilineal ruling castes, just like the hypergamous marriages between these ruling castes, served to define the political unit, that is, the chiefdom.

The matrilineal rules of the Kerala castes, and their near-perfect fit on the one hand with the patrilineal Brahmins, and on the other hand with a military system based on hereditary warriors,[2] has fascinated many anthropologists.[3] Matriliny in itself is however not of direct relevance to the relationship of caste to traditional political organisation. It affects the detail of interaction, and is given here as necessary background material for the description of specific events and institutions in this chapter and the next.

Before describing the chiefdoms of Kerala, it is necessary to evaluate our sources. This is a necessary step if any measure of objectivity is to be attained. The

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1. Bailey, 1963b, p. 108.
2. Gough, 1952, pp. 76-77.
3. These include Gough, Miller, Rao, Mencher, and Unni.

historians have warned that no source materials are free of some kind of bias, and for the anthropologist this is now accepted dogma. But in addition, such an evaluation is of interest in itself and reveals the climate of opinion in which these materials took shape. If the latter is a digression, it is nontheless important to the whole problem of using historical material.

My sources for Kerala fall into six broad categories. Of these, four are charter-type histories, justifying some existing political situation. The remaining two are, firstly contemporary records of events which may include charter-type history, but are mainly descriptive; and secondly works of simple scholarship.

To take them in order, the first of the charter histories are the mythical variety. These are relatively old (probably pre-European), show local biases, and incorporate both legendary stories and factual accounts into the same "history". These are the Keralolpatti in Malayalam,[1] Keralamahatmyam[2] in Sanskrit and the Keralavartaman in Malayalam,[3] untranslated, and probably pro-Muslim. The popular account is that of Keralolpatti (that is, "origin of Kerala"). It is largely a legitimisation of the Brahmin

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1. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, pp. 313-314.
2. Gundert, 1844, pp.97-105.
3. India Office Library, on palm-leaves.

power on the one hand, and of the existence of several chiefdoms on the other. Concerned mainly with the Zamorins, it is nevertheless a regional history of Kerala. It is thought to date to the seventeenth century.[1] The Keralamahatmyam also dates to this period. The value of these works as source material is doubtful. "The [Keralamahatmyam], written in indifferent Sanskrit, purports to be an excerpt from the Agni Purana, and exhibits throughout the tendency of the Brahman to manufacture the sanctions of history for the inflated pretensions of his caste. The Keralolpatti, a Malayalam work, though full of inconsistencies and vain repetitions, suggests a more popular origin, and on that account is worthier of serious analysis".[2]

The second category of charter histories is the work of local historians, writing in the early twentieth century. They wrote under the patronage of Kerala chiefs, some of whom still held their chiefdoms. Their work is painstaking, and includes materials from primary sources, such as manuscript records of the chiefly family concerned, or temple records. The special historian of Cochin was K.P. Padmanabha Menon,[3] of the Zamorin, K.V.K. Ayyar,[4] and of Travancore the chief were Nagam Aiya[5] and Velupillai.[6]

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1. Pillay, 1953, p. 12.
2. Innes, 1908, p. 39.
3. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1929.
4. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1931, 1938.
5. Nagam Aiya, 1906.
6. Velupillai, 1940.

They wrote in English and, if they were local men, in Malayalam as well. Their histories are not strictly speaking objective. At their worst, they have some obvious bowing and scraping to the patron, and at their best they are building up the image of the ruling family probably for the benefit of the imperial government. Their emphasis on the local unit however provides valuable factual information.

The third and fourth categories, the regional and the colonial historians, are less concerned with local units. The regional historian, who is usually the regional patriot - and K.M. Panikkar,[1] Nambiar,[2] Gopalan,[3] and Raja[4] all fall into this category - does not gain in objectivity though his perspective is wider. On the contrary, the comparison with other regions and indeed, other countries, vitiates analysis. Regional consciousness, inextricably mixed up with national consciousness, leads to an emotive view of history, and a heavily biased, though not falsified, history. Though not lacking in insights, on the whole this is among the less useful sources. The loss of local detail is not compensated by the wider perspective, since that perspective is not a

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1. Panikkar, 1931, 1960.
2. Nambiar, 1963.
3. Gopalan, 1959.
4. Raja, 1953.

theoretical but an ideological one.

The colonial histories are more subtle in their bias. They are not concerned with local politics, except insofar as they affected the colonial activities of the succeeding waves of Europeans. Because they have no local interests, there is a tendency among scholars to regard them as having no bias. On their own scale however, bias operates both in the selection of facts, and in their interpretation. Their usefulness for local history must always be limited. Logan,[1] a late nineteenth century historian-cum-administrator in Kerala, is an exception. His scholarship is considerable, and he has translated several Malayalam documents. He errs, however, on the romantic side of colonialism, standing up for the subject peoples. Other colonial historians are Innes,[2] Alexander,[3] Ferroli[4] (a missionary), Drury,[5] Duncan,[6] and Galletti.[7] None are free from what could be called a colonial bias.

Contemporary records have an obvious value in research. They are first hand accounts of events, interspersed with hearsay accounts current at the time. They are exactly analogous to the information given to the anthropologist by individuals belonging to the groups he is

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1. Logan, 1887, 1891.
2. Innes, 1908.
3. Alexander, 1946.
4. Ferroli, 1939.
5. Drury, 1860.
6. Duncan, 1819.
7. Galletti, 1911. "The Dutch in Malabar", Selections from the records of the Madras government, Madras, 1911.

studying. Bias in these accounts is almost entirely local, and achieves none of the scale of the theoretical and ideological biasses that colour both charter and supposedly objective histories. We might call it "informant's bias". Such bias is part and parcel of the range of facts being analysed. Unfortunately, contemporary records are not exhaustive, and it is impossible to weight them as we do not know what has not been recorded. But if such information is uneven, it is the closest to reality that historical materials will ever reach. Contemporary records for Kerala are plentiful. Of these, the vernacular records have not yet been sufficiently explored. What we know of them is mainly through the local, the regional, and the colonial historians. European records are more easily accessible, though Dutch and Portuguese sources are not all translated. The Portuguese writings of Albuquerque[1] and Barbosa,[2] English accounts by Hamilton[3] and Buchanan,[4] the Tellicherry correspondence,[5] and a Report by a Joint Commission[6] from Bombay and Bengal immediately after Kerala was annexed are

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1. Albuquerque, translated in 1877.
2. Barbosa, published 1866.
3. Hamilton, reissued 1930.
4. Buchanan, 1807.
5. Records of Fort St. George, 1729-31, 1749-50.
6. Report of a Joint Commission from Bombay and Bengal... in 1792 and 1793, published 1862.

some of the European sources used here. These serve as valuable checks on vernacular information, and also provide the occasional telling detail. They are however not a sufficient source for local history.

The last category, of simple scholarship, is a pitifully small one both in range of interest and in output. It includes mainly brief articles discussing documents and inscriptions relating to ruling families or temples in Kerala, and are published in academic journals such as "Kerala Society Papers", mingled with other articles on culture, or history.

All six types of sources are used here, with an effort to cull the facts from each and cross-check where possible, and with no further attempt to explain their specific biasses as that is a major problem in itself.

## The Kerala Chiefdoms

During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, there were at least ninety chiefdoms in Kerala. Our information about these chiefdoms is uneven. It is also likely that some minor chiefs have escaped mention in the records. The lacunae however, could not be serious. Chiefs could only have escaped notice if they were very small and unimportant. Certainly, a map of Kerala with the known ninety odd chiefdoms marked on it shows no conspicuous blank

spaces.

The Kerala chiefdoms were not equivalent political units. They varied in territorial extent from a few square miles to a few hundred square miles. We know, for example, that a large chiefdom like Kottayam in North Malabar covered 312 square miles, and Iruvalinad covered 45 square miles.[1] Smaller chiefdoms, noticed by the Europeans, probably covered 10 to 20 square miles. Of the remoter minor chiefs we know very little, and it is possible that their territories were more extensive, though they almost certainly were sparsely populated.

The variation in size correlated with a variation both in the power of the chief and of his caste status, though such correlation was only approximate, and not exact. The larger chiefdoms were favourably situated, either along the sea-coast, or in the wide plains area of central Kerala. These chiefs belonged to the Kshatriya and Samanthan castes. In all, twenty chiefs were Kshatriya, and five were Samanthans. Most of the Kshatriya chiefdoms were strung along the coastline. Of the Samanthan chiefs, only one (the Zamorin) commanded a good stretch of coast, and both traditional and documentary sources indicate that he acquired this by conquest. His original territory was, like that of the

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1. Buchanan, vol. II, 1807, p. 540.

other Samanthan chiefs, a large inland area of low hills and valleys. This distribution of Kshatriya and Samanthan chiefs dates back at least to the Portuguese arrival, and probably goes back further. When or how the differentiation occured, we do not know. The higher caste status of coastal chiefs may have followed the development of overseas trade with the Middle East and South East Asia. Or the inland chiefs, the five Samanthan ruling families, may have grown from minor chiefs of Nayar caste as a result of the growing demand for the pepper which grew well in their low, hilly terrain. The small number of the Samanthan chiefs makes it very likely that they were such a splinter group, a sub-caste in the making, which broke away from the Nayars. Too small numerically to close their ranks, they generally contracted hypergamous marriages, with women taking Brahmin or Kshatriya consorts, and men marrying high Nayar women. The Samanthan chiefdoms were all located in central Kerala.

Intermingled with the major chiefdoms of the Kshatriya and Samanthan ruling families were a large number, at least fifty-seven, of minor chiefs, normally Nayars but separated from the main body of the caste by titles such as Kaimal, Achanmar, Nambiar, and Adiyodi. In some areas, Nambiars and Adiyodis were separate castes, and we are not always sure whether for example, a Nambiar chief is a Nayar with a title, or is of the Nambiar caste. This

is especially the case in north Kerala. It is also possible that the distinction between Nayar and Nambiar castes is not a clear one.

While there is no difference between Kshatriya and Samanthan chiefdoms in terms of size and resources, and they compete on equal terms, all the Nayar chiefdoms are in comparison smaller and weaker, and dependent to a varying degree on one or other powerful Kshatriya or Samanthan chiefdoms. They were generally located in remote or isolated areas, such as outlying mountains. There were also a small number of Brahmin chiefs. They were all located in central Kerala. None was very powerful in terms of economic resources or military power, though they generally enjoyed the high ritual status of all Kerala Brahmins.

The caste of the chief did not determine, in itself, the position of a chiefdom. Generally speaking, Nayar chiefs were the weakest, unable to escape domination by more powerful chiefs. The more powerful chiefs were always Kshatriya or Samanthan. There was however no regular pattern of domination between Samanthans and Kshatriyas. The Samanthan chief, the Zamorin, had at least four Kshatriyas as his dependents. The other Samanthan chiefs were powerful, but usually nominally dependent on a Kshatriya chief. Here, we need to step with caution. If we make allowance for the fact that the Zamorin broke out of his inland territory, won a place on the coast,

and upset the existing balance of power, we could postulate an original consistent caste-oriented hierarchy of chiefdoms. This "original hierarchy" dates too far beyond our documented period to be sufficiently proved. It is however a useful reminder that the system under consideration was not a static one. Theoretically, all the chiefdoms were sovereign independent units, since each had a right to engage in armed conflict on its own, a right supported by the method of recruiting an army by local chiefs from among local Nayars. In actual practice, the military capacity of the chiefdoms varied. The more powerful chiefdoms were able to impose their authority upon smaller chiefs, compelling them to pay tribute, to contribute Nayar levies in wars with other chiefs, to render services of a ritual kind where such domination was of long standing, and to deny them ~~of~~ certain privileges, such as coining money or tiling the roofs of their palaces.

There were four major clusters of chiefdoms in Kerala, centred around the four powerful chiefdoms of Kolattunad, Ernad and its extensions, Cochin, and Travancore. The ruling families of these were respectively Kshatriya, Samanthan, Kshatriya and Kshatriya. The history of Kerala is largely the history of the struggles of these chiefs with each other. The other chiefdoms figure largely as dependents of one or other of these four. Territorial proximity was an essential condition of dependence, as it was indeed of all political

interaction. The major chiefdoms were ringed by dependent chiefdoms, ranging from quite powerful Kshatriya chiefdoms to the smaller Nayar chiefdoms that were large, near-independent agricultural estates rather than chiefdoms. The chiefdoms on the border of the cluster could, and often did, rebel against the central chiefdom, and might even join its enemies. The clusters were not formally recognised political entities, though in fact they persisted almost unchanged till the early eighteenth century.

If we examine each cluster of chiefdoms we find that there is invariably one central or core chiefdom, surrounded by a few powerful chiefs, with their dependent chiefs, and several smaller ones. The number of chiefdoms in each cluster ranges approximately from nineteen to twenty-three. The more powerful the core chief, the greater was his capacity to impose some degree of authority on dependent chiefs and to utilise their military potential to further his own interests. The Ernad cluster, led by Ernad's ruler, the Zamorin, (famous in early European records) was perhaps the most powerful. The Zamorin, by extending his direct territorial rule to the area between Ernad and the sea, became the most powerful chief in that part of Kerala, and was able to impose effective control over nearly all his immediate neighbours. The Kolattunad cluster to his north was relatively weak, since the core chiefdom was not very powerful and was unable to

exercise any real control over its dependent chiefdoms. Cochin, south of the Zamorin, led the smallest cluster and this included a high proportion of small chiefs of Nayar or Kaimal status. It was however a more tightly-knit cluster than Kolattunad, for example.

The southernmost cluster of chiefdoms led by Travancore, was hardly a cluster at all up to the early eighteenth century. After that, it was systematically integrated until it became a full-fledged state. The earlier looseness of this cluster was possibly due to the rather special historical conditions that obtained in south Kerala. The various empires of the east coast had made frequent inroads into south Kerala, and levied taxes on its inhabitants. The indigenous dynasties of south Kerala were not dispossessed. But the effect on south Kerala seems to have been a weakening of the leading chiefly family, which split into several independent families, ruling independently of each other. A similar split occurred in Kolattunad, but only as late as the eighteenth century when the chiefdom was partitioned between two branches of the family.

It is significant that the Zamorin, himself a Samanthan, had no Samanthan dependents though he had eight Kshatriya chiefs dependent at various times. Cochin's Kshatriya family could claim four dependent Samanthans up to the early eighteenth century, while his Kshatriya

dependents - three related families - passed out of his control either to the Zamorin or, in the seventeenth century, to the Dutch. The Kshatriya chiefs of Kolattunad counted one other Kshatriya family in their cluster, but this was powerful enough to be in practice independent. In Travancore, there were nine Kshatriya families of whom five were branches of the original family, two were branches of one of these, and two were said to be of foreign origin. We have seen that this was hardly a cluster at all.

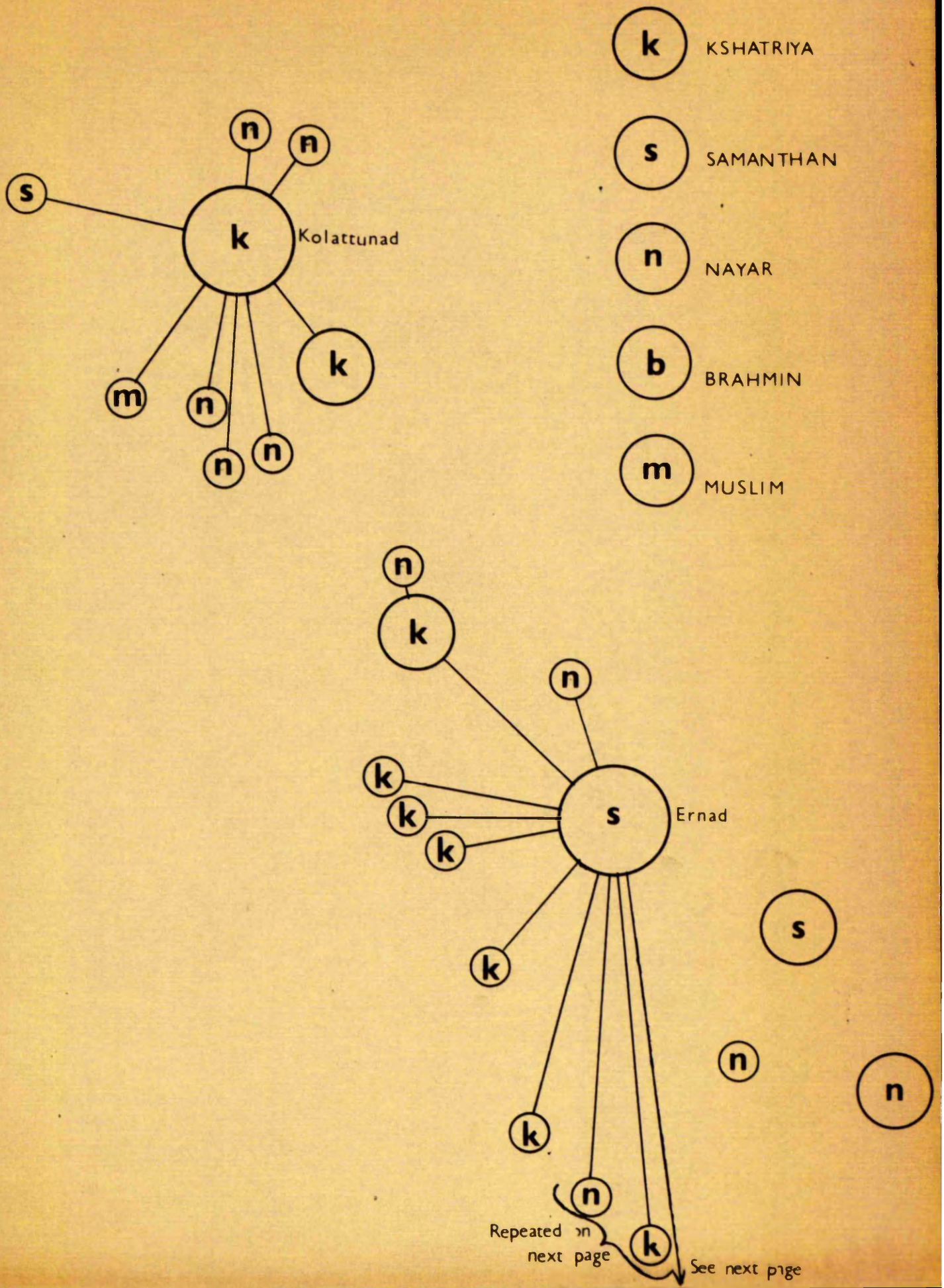
It is reasonable to suppose that it would be difficult for one chief to exercise control over another from his own caste, more difficult even than to control a chief from a higher caste. The chances of holding a cluster together were better when the core chiefdom did not have to face a caste-fellow. This would account for the fact that the Zamorins, in their period of expansion, fully annexed territories held by Samanthan chiefs - that is, dispossessed them - and only extended control, without annexation, over Kshatriya chiefs. The leading Samanthan chiefdom of Valluvanad, though the immediate neighbour of the Zamorins and a continuous rival till the conflict shifted to the sea in the fourteenth century, was neither annexed (because too powerful) nor subjugated (because inherently more difficult to control by virtue of common caste). The lack of integration of the Travancore cluster is related to the presence of chiefs of the same caste. It is however not possible to say whether the

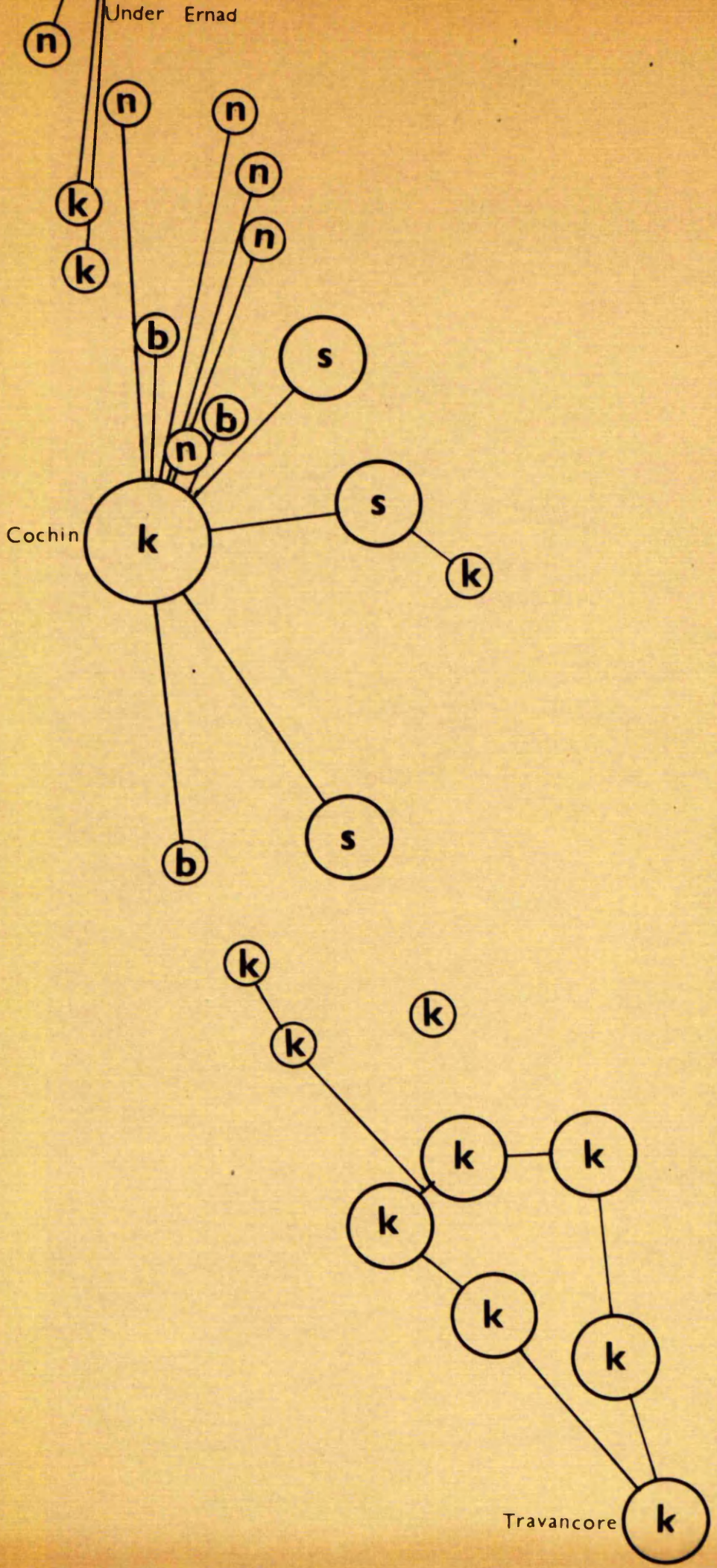
proliferation of Kshatriya chiefs was the effect of the political weakening of the ruling dynasty (and thence of the cluster), or whether the political weakness was a consequence of the existence of several chiefs of the same caste. Imperial domination by the east coast provided the conditions for internal political weakness in Travancore.

The following is a diagrammatic representation of the clusters of chiefdoms in Kerala, upto the early eighteenth century, giving the caste of the chiefs. The scale of the diagram corresponds exactly to the map of Kerala given at the beginning of this chapter.

# the clusters of chiefdoms in kerala

TILL THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY




Under Ernad
Cochin
Travancore

The ruling families of all except Brahmin chiefdoms followed matrilineal rules of succession and inheritance, as observed in the matrilineal castes generally. Family property was held jointly by the family which consisted of consanguinal kin: brothers, sisters, the sisters' children, their daughters' children, and so on. In north Kerala a man could and did often opt out of such a household to set up a new home with a wife. The children however had rights in the mothers' natal family. The double loyalty, to his own sons, and to his sisters' sons, was a source of conflict in north Kerala.[1] The property was inalienable and impartible. When, however, the joint family, or tarawad, became too large, it could decide to partition the property among constituent segments, or tavazhis. Each tavazhi, (consisting again of brothers, sisters, and the latters' children), grew into a full tarawad in the course of time. The position of head of the family, or karnavan, descended by simple seniority through collaterals, to the sisters' sons.

The tavazhis of the ruling families also partitioned the family's private property in this way. In fact there was much less partition among ruling families than among the Nayars, for example. The residential unit had a much

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1. Schneider and Gough, 1961, p. 392; Innes, Vol. I, 1908, pp. 57-58; Logan, Vol. I, 1887, p. 345.

greater generation depth than the average Nayar family. In 1950, one branch of the Zamorin's family had 172 members, of eight generations, residing together.[1] Reasons for less frequent segmentation in ruling families given by Gough are 1), the fear of loss of power of the family, 2), formal political offices, which separate the oldest males from their families and thence from family conflicts, and 3), minimal involvement with the land, enabling individuals to live apart though sharing the property.[2] Political office, however, continued to descend as in the original tarawad, by seniority of age, except in the Travancore cluster of chiefdoms. Here, the partition was complete and the segments of the original family developed into five separate chiefdoms. We know little of when or how this occurred. By the seventeenth century, it was a fait accompli. In Kolattunad, a complete partition occurred in mid-eighteenth century between two branches of the family.

The ruling families have a continuous existence from at least the ninth century onwards. Each one of them segmented into several branches. But, as we saw, there was no significant fragmentation of political units. Even in

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1. Gough, 1950.
2. Ibid.

the south, the five chiefdoms that grew out of the Travancore family did not segment any further. In Kolattunad, the partition came very late, was instigated by the English interest in north Kerala, and was of a limited extent. It was not a division among all the branches of the family, but only between one hostile branch and the rest. How the families avoided the problem of natural increase is not at all clear. Unlike Rajasthan, where chiefdoms were kept intact by the high incidence of death in war among possible successors, the persons of chiefs and their families were sacrosanct in war. There was no migration to other territories. Since these families were wealthy, their survival rates must have been quite high. The answer may lie in marriage customs -a higher age of marriage, less stable marital unions.[1]

The families which segmented lineally but continued to share the original chiefly offices of the family were rarely faced with extinction. The segments, among themselves, were usually able to provide heirs. Where the segments broke up however, as in the case of Travancore, the danger of extinction was constantly present, and they had to resort frequently to adoptions to continue the line. The

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1. Gough, 1959, pp. 23-34.

proliferation without separation of segments in a chiefly family thus ensured the continuity of the family. Such continuity was indispensable for the existence of the whole system of petty chiefdoms ruled by families of one or other of the ruling castes.

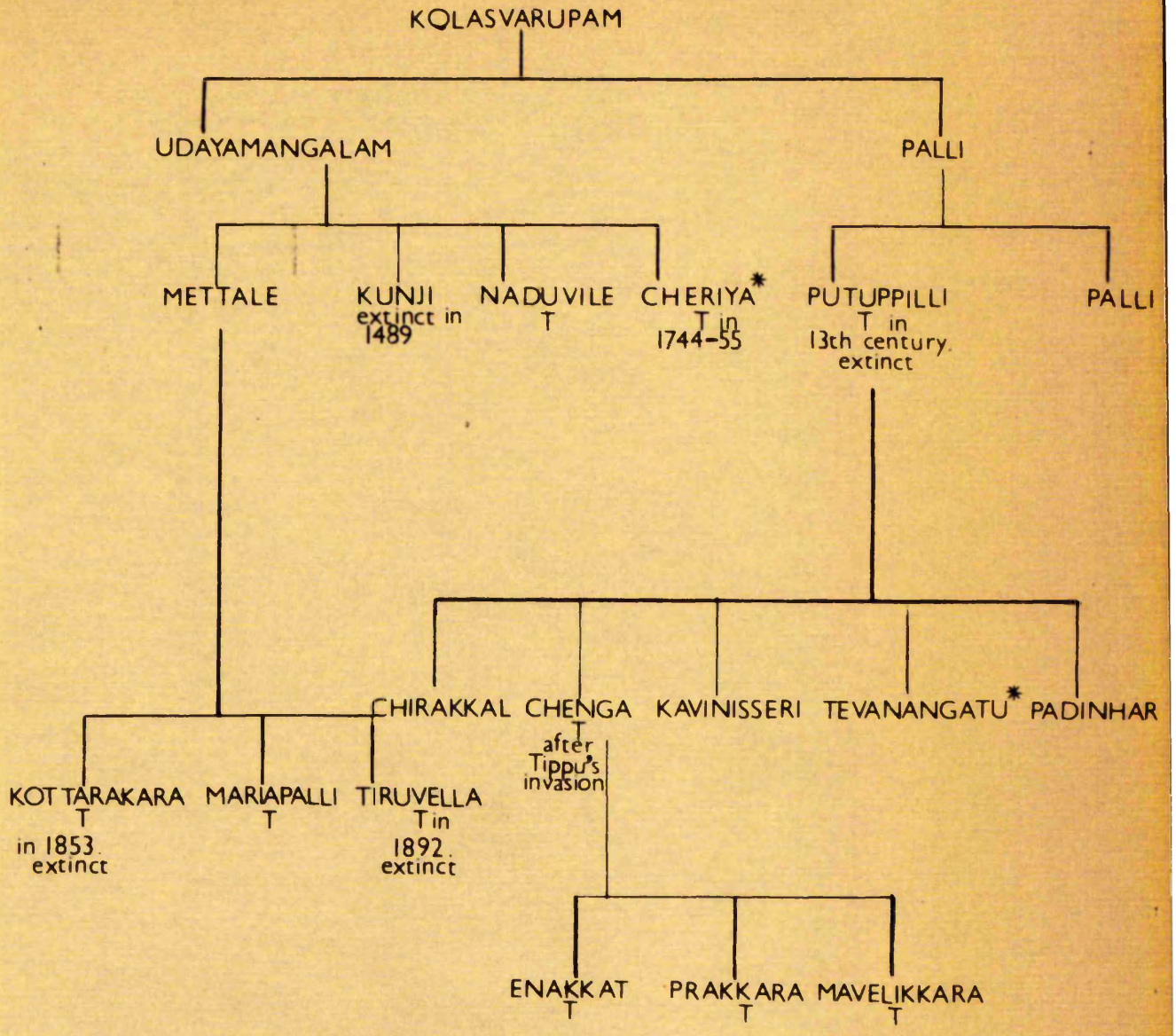
Each ruling family recognised a series of sthanams, or political statuses, to be held by its adult males. The powers of chiefship were shared differentially by these sthanams, which were held on the basis of seniority of age. The segments of the ruling family shared succession to the sthanams, even after they had separated both residence and share in ancestral property from the original family. Normally, at one time or other, the sthanams would be held collectively by all branches of the family. In practice, we find that a powerful branch could, and often did, reserve succession to sthanams to itself and possibly to a friendly or closely related branch, as occurred in both Cochin and Kolattunad.

The greatest number of sthanams recognised in a Kerala chiefdom was six, among the Zamorins. The smaller the chiefdom, the fewer the sthanams it recognised, or, indeed needed. There is some evidence to show that the number of sthanams in a chiefdom varied according to its territorial extent and the ambitions of the ruling family.

A discussion of individual svarupams - that is,

ruling families - is closely involved with their sthanams. The two are therefore dealt with together. Svarupams, as far as possible, are represented in a genealogical tree, but no attempt is made to date them accurately. They can only be vaguely assigned to a particular century.

# THE KOLASVARUPAM OF KOLATTUNAD




T = migrated to Travancore.

* = Cheriya migrated because Palli objected to its allowing adoptions by Travancore : Tevanangatu made an adoption from Enakkat in 1835.

Based on Padmanabha Menon, 1929 and Logan, 1887

The Kolasvarupam, a quite prolific family, has instances of migration of segments of a ruling family which was rare in Kerala. The British, for purposes of granting pensions prior to annexation,[1] recognised five branches of the family in Kolattunad itself. Those who had migrated to Travancore and settled there were not recognised for a pension from the new British government. The recognised families were the Udayamangalam Mettale Kovilakam of the senior branch, and the Chenga, Kavinisseri, Tevanangatu and Padinhar Kovilakams of the junior Palli branch. The Chirakkal branch, by then, had monopolised succession to the chiefship. The pension to the chief was probably also a pension for the Chirakkal family, though this is not explicit in the pension list.

There were five recognised political statuses, the sthanams in the original Kolasvarupam. These were graded in rank. Succession to them was by seniority of age, taking all branches of the svarupam into account. The chief of the whole territory was known as the Kolathiri, and he ruled directly the central parts of Kolattunad. His palaces,

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1. See Pension List, Appendix.

cremation ground, and temples were located here. The Kolathiri sthanam was the seniormost.

The second and third sthanams were respectively, the Tekkelamkur i.e. southern viceroy, and the Vadakkelamkur, i.e. northern viceroy. They ruled directly the southern and northern parts respectively of Kolattunad. The ruling family of Kadattanad chiefdom to the south of Kolattunad is said to have sprung from a woman married to a Tekkelamkur. The ruling family of Nilesvaram,[1] to the immediate north, is said to have originated from the marriage by elopement of an Ernad princess to a Vadakkelamkur.

The fourth and fifth sthanams of Nalamkur and Anchamkur carried no share of territorial government. The Nalamkur managed the Kolathiri householed and dispensed titles and honours to Nayars and lower castes.[2] The Anchamkur was personal aide-de-camp to the Kolathiri.[3] There was also a female sthanam, the Achamma Muppusthanam[4] held by the oldest woman member of the svarupam.

Succession to all sthanams was, as pointed out earlier, by seniority of age. It is very unlikely that formal succession went to the ablest, as stated by K.P. Padmanabha Menon.[5] A more realistic appraisal of Kolattunad dynastic

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1. Now a part of south Canara.
2. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, Vol, II, 1929, p. 195.
3. Ibid, pp. 194-195.
4. Logan, Vol. I, 1887, p. 346.
5. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, Vol. I, 1924, p. 481.

politics is given by Logan. "On examining the records it is found that, as a rule, the ablest member of the family, sometimes peaceably with the consent of all the members, sometimes by force, seized the reins of power at the earliest possible opportunity, and the rest of the family, although perhaps senior to himself, were mere puppets in his hands".[1] In the eighteenth century, severe conflicts arose about the succession because the rule was not allowed to operate as before, and English traders were actively interested that the sthanams be occupied by princes of the svarupam who were friendly to them. Logan is not free of a romantic bias in evaluating the political and other institutions of Kerala. Padmanabha Menon was Cochin's historian extraordinary, interpreting to a foreign "overlord" government which in theory, and usually in practice, denied heredity as a basis of recruitment in government, and extolled merit. Their respective biases are evident in their account of the sthanams.

The events of the eighteenth century throw some light on the inside politics of the Kolasvarupam. The two main extraneous factors that affected Kolattunad at this time were, one, the development of European trading posts, especially by

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1. Logan, Vol. I, 1887, p. 347.

the English, and two, the invasions from the north by a Canarese chief.

In 1708, the Vadakkelamkur (third sthanam) who was then of the Palli Kovilakam[1] granted the English a fort at Tellicherry. In 1722, the Kolathiri himself granted certain lands to the English, and these were confirmed in 1724 by three "nephews" of the Kolathiri.[2] We do not know what branch of the family the Kolathiri belonged to, but the "nephews" were from two Udayamangalam (the senior) branches and the Palli (junior) branch. The svarupam was still ruling its traditional territory as one family. In 1730 however, a Palli prince, and not the Kolathiri, promised the English that he would keep out other Europeans from the dependent chiefdoms of Iruvalinad, Randattara, and from Trentapatam.

Family dissension suddenly erupted into a major conflict in 1732, when the enemies[3] of the Vadakkelamkur - but we are not told who exactly they were - invited the Canarese chief of Bednur to invade Kolattunad. Kottayam came to Kolattunad's assistance when the Canarese reached its frontiers, and the English and the Dutch, suffering alike from the cutting off of rice supplies from Canara,

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1. Logan, 1891, Part I, No. III.
2. Logan, 1891, Part I, Nos. VIII & IX.
3. Innes, 1908, Vol. I, p. 59.

joined to fight for the "safety of Malabar".[1] By 1737, the English succeeded in mediating a formal peace[2] between the Kolathiri and Bednur, and Benur was not to cross the Valarpattanam river. This river boundary was "obstinately maintained",[3] but the fighting went on.

The split in the Kolasvarupam now became crystallised, with the Vadakkelamkur, a Palli kovilakam man and immediate neighbour to Bednur by virtue of his chiefly duties in northern Kolattunad, fighting against Bednur, while the Anchamkur (fifth sthanam), an Udayamangalam man, joined Bednur.[4] The English came out on the side of the Palli kovilakam.

The Vadakkelamkur, in 1749, an Udayamangalam man, was persuaded to partition Kolattunad, and grant full rights to the Palli branch to all the territory south of Taliparamba river.[5] Later in the year, it was finally agreed to divide the territories at Cheria kunhu.[6] This same agreement refers to the disputes "that have happened between my heirs and Unamen and Cunhi Ramen of Palli Colote".[7]

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1. Ibid, p. 59.
2. Logan, 1891, Part, I, No. XXXVIII.
3. Innes, 1908, Vol. I, p. 61.
4. Logan, 1891, Part I, No. XXXVIII.
5. Logan, 1887, Vol. I,
6. Logan, 1891, Part I, translation of a grant in the Diary of the Tellicherry Factory for 1749.
7. i.e. kovilakattu, "of kovilakam".

A prince of the Chirakkal branch of the Palli kovilakam, called by the English the Prince Regent,[1] imprisoned the Vadakkelamkur who was an Udayamangalam man. He then released him, but the juniors of the latter's family objected and were thereupon driven into the forests by the English. Around 1751, a new English factor at Tellicherry decided to recognise the Kolathiri,[2] an Udaymangalam man, and persuaded him to appoint a young prince from his own family as the Regent. The factor was displeased with the Chirakkal princes who were trying to subjugate Iruvalinad, formerly a direct dependent of the Kolathiri, and Kadattanad, formerly controlled by whoever was the Tekkelamkur.[3] Chirakkal at once marched against its southern dependents. The English found their proteges divided, and suspicious of them,[4] and proceeded to imprison the Kolathiri and his successor as hostages.

The Chirakkal prince fell in, and then out, of favour with the English. He died in 1759. At once the Regency, recognised by the English, became the subject of a succession dispute. The holder of the Vadakkelamkur sthanam, senior in age to the deceased prince, and the sister's son

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1. This is most probably the Tekkelamkur Sthanam.
2. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, Vol. II, 1929, p. 217.
3. Logan, 1891, Part I, No. LXVI.
4. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, Vol. II, 1929, p. 217.

of the deceased (who had married his uncle's daughter - a princess of Kadattanad by succession to her mother), were the rival contenders. The Vadakkelamkur won with English support. The French-backed nephew of the deceased had to leave the country.

The invasions from Mysore put an end to internal dissension for nearly three decades. After British annexation, in the settlement of the region, the family and its sthanams again came up for discussion. In 1800, a mochulka was drawn up by two gramams (Brahmin villages), the Nerikod and Chuzhali Nambiars, and the principal mukhyasthans (landowners?) of Chirakkal district (the former chiefdom), advising the English on the rights of the Chirakkal family.

"In obedience to the honourable English Company's orders that we point out the just mode of allotting the Cherical[1] property as well as one-fifth[2] of the collections to the five Colghums[3] of the Pally Colghum; upon due consideration of all the circumstances we give it as our joint opinion, that the Nelly[4] and Puram[5] amount of the Pally Colote[6] property, be equally divided among the five Colghums, that the Cherical[7] Colgham receive one-half of the one-fifth share of the collections, and that the residue be divided

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1. i.e. privately owned by kovilakam, sthanam, etc.
2. Allotted by English, later replaced by pensions.
3. i.e. kovilakams.
4. A measure of rice. Gundert, 1872.
5. A measure of rice, probably unhusked. Personal communication by Mr. Sharad Chandran.
6. i.e. Kovilakattu.
7. i.e. Chirakkal.

among the other Colghums to defray their expenses; that the private property which may ... appear to have been acquired by the Rajas of the Cherical Colghum be continued to the said Colghum. That the property belonging to the Othenmungolum[1] Colghum be managed by the Rajas thereof. That in like manner the private property of the Poothoowally[2] Colghum be disposed of or granted thereto.

"We concur in opinion that the above is agreeable to right and the customs of the country. The above-mentioned five Colghums are the Cherical, Cherical Padiniara, Cheanga, Teawaangoda, and Kawanashery Colghums".[3]

This document marks an important step taken by the English in resolving family disputes in Kolattunad. Just two years earlier, there had been armed encounters between princes of the Chirakkal and Chenga kovilakams, ended only when the latter were killed in an attempt on Puttur temple which was guarded by Chirakkal's Nayars. Earlier quarrels within or between kovilakams are not unknown,[4] but we know little about the participants.

The sthanams themselves became a matter of dispute even after other rights had been suitably partitioned among the kovilakams. After the 1749 partition, the Kolathiri

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1. i.e. Udayamangalam.
2. i.e. Putupilli.
3. See genealogy, p. 107.
4. Logan, Vol. I, 1887, pp. 344-347; Hamilton, (1727), 1930 ed. pp. 165-166.

title receded in importance. The Udayamangalam family, confined to northern Kolattunad, dropped out of the picture, except as a counter used by the English to control the Chirakkal princes. The Chirakkal family were now the effective rulers, and the Kolathiri was replaced by Chirakkal raja as the premier sthanam. Kolathiri sthanam was recognised side by side, but shorn of its original power. From 1749 to the early nineteenth century, there was seven Chirakkal rajas. The last one sent his sister and her two sons to Travancore to protect them from Tippu Sultan before he had himself shot. In the confusion at the English take-over, a Palangat (Padinhar?) man passed off as Chirakkal raja, but was succeeded by a genuine Chirakkal prince. The rightful Kolathiri at this time came from the Chenga kovilakam.[1]

The separation of titles and privileges, and the development, without supersession, of new titles, led to a dispute in 1821 between the Udayamangalam family and the Palli group of kovilakams. The British had granted a large pension to the Chirakkal Rajas and to the related kovilakams, and a small pension to Udayamangalam. They did not however deny the latter the right to claim the Kolathiri sthanam.

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1. Buchanan, 1807, Vol. II, pp. 557-558.

Udayamangalam appealed for a higher pension as the rightful claimant, at the time of appeal, to the Kolathiri sthanam. But the English court refused to recognise any relation between traditional sthanams and present privilege.[1]

The pension list[2] reflects the decaying of the Kolattunad sthanams. Not one of the original five sthanams merited a pension.

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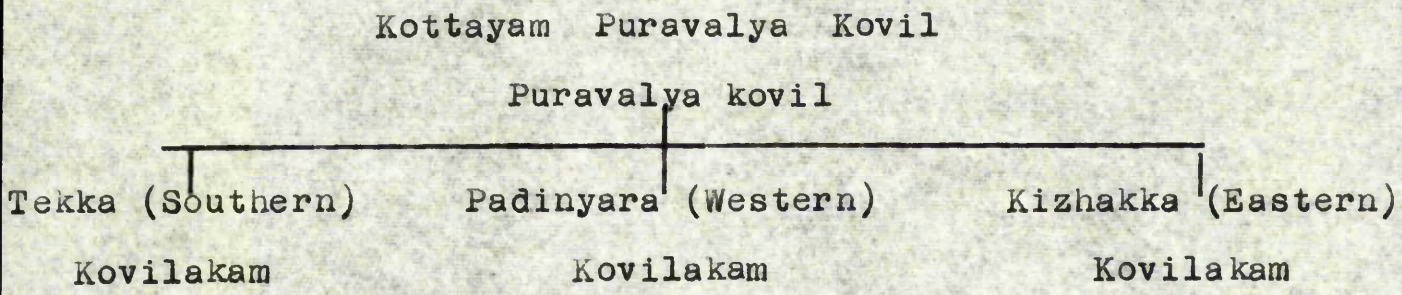


The kovilakams of the Kottayam family were recognised as legitimate recipients of British pension. We know very little about the relations between the kovilakams until the British annexation. They were related to the ruling family of Kurumbranad, of whom they are supposed to be a younger branch.[3] They are believed to have acquired Kottayam by conquest from Kolattunad.[4] The Padinyara kovilakam, known also as Pazhachi, at one time owned Kadolly in Tamarasseri -

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1. Logan 1891, footnote to Part I, No. XXXVIII quoted from Special Appeal Case No. 9, 1821, in Sadr Adalat.
2. See Appendix.
3. Buchanan, 1807, Vol. II, p. 499.
4. Ibid, p. 499.

a territory south of Kurumbranad, held by the family.[1]

There were four recognised sthanams[2] for males - the Mutta (Elder) Raja,[3] the Elaya (Junior) Raja, the Munnamkur,[4] the fourth is not specified anywhere. There was, however, a fourth sthanam, held at Tippu's invasion by the Padinyara kovilakam. This sthani, known as Pazhachi Raja, aided the British, but became a rebel after their annexation,[5] ostensibly due to a misunderstanding.[6]

There was no recognised female sthanam, though succession was matrilineal.[7] The sthanams were not recognised as recipients of British pensions. These were granted only to the kovilakams.[8]

Porlathiri Svarupam of Kadattanad.

Tradition[9] has it that this family, originally Nayars of high status, conquered its chiefdom from Kolattunad. It acquired its chief port Vadakkekara from Kolattunad as late as 1564 A.D.[10] Another tradition[11] says they were

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1. Ibid, p. 483.
2. Ibid, p. 483.
3. Logan, 1891, Part I, No. XXX, 1736; Pt. II, No. CLVII, 1797.
4. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1929, Vol. II, p. 234.
5. Buchanan, 1807, Vol. II, p. 484.
6. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, pp. 514-515.
7. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1929, Vol. II, p. 233, Logan, 1891.
8. See Appendix.
9. Listed among others by Buchanan.
10. Kunhi Kannan in Logan, Vol. II, 1887.
11. Keralolpatti, quoted in all local historians.

originally chiefs of Poland, from which they were driven out in the thirteenth century by the Zamorin of Ernad. One of their princesses married a Tekkelamkur of Kolattunad, and her descendants became chiefs of Kadattanad.

The family split into two kovilakams, both recognised for British pensions.[1] A letter from the Kolathiri to Tellicherry refers to the chief of Kadattanad as Putiya kovilakattu Adiody,[2] but there is no Putiya kovilakam in the pension list. The sthanams, two male and one female, were also recognised.[3] The female sthanam of Porlathiri Valiya (Senior) Rani was considered to be the highest of the three.[4]

### Achanmars[5] of Randattara

The four Achanmars are said to have split from two original families. No sthanams are mentioned here. Achan was a title conferred on important Nayars. The Randattara Achanmars were not Svarupis, or sovereign chiefs, and would not therefore recognise sthanams, but only headship of the family. They were not granted pensions because they had been

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1. See Appendix.
2. Logan, 1891, Part I, No. LXVI, 1751.
3. See Appendix.
4. Logan, 1891, Part I, note to No. XIII, 1725.
5. A chiefly title used by Nayars.

allowed to retain their houses and a temple estate, free of tax.

### The Iruvalinad Nambiars

There were six Nambiar families, said to have grown out of two Adiyodi[1] families. The Kizhakedatta, Mittangott, Kampratta, and Chandroth are segments of one family. The other family split into the Kariyad and the Narangoli. Three branches, or tavazhis, of the last-named are recognised for pensions.[2] The other Nambiars (assuming that the pension list is exhaustive), did not segment any further.

Like the Achanmars, they have no recognised sthanams.

### The Kurungoth Tadam (family)

This was a Nayar family, without sthanams, probably segmented judging from the separate pensions[3] granted to its members. Whether these represented separate families is however uncertain.

The families so far described were the major units that make up the northern - most cluster around Kolattunad. It seems clear that some amount of segmentation of families

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1. High Nayars, either a sub-caste or title.
2. See Appendix.
3. See Appendix.

was a common occurrence in all of them, though it was less frequent in the svarupams than in the Nayar joint family.[1] In the more powerful families, political status is defined and separated from headship of the family in the form of sthanams. Nayar chiefs do not recognise sthanams. They are merely heads of their families. Families where political functions are separated from domestic ones through sthanams also have the further elaboration of a severalty of sthanams. The recognition of up to six sthanams - the maximum for Kerala chiefdoms - ensured that power was distributed among branches of the family at the same time that it enabled the family to rule quite large areas effectively. It prevented any one branch from monopolising power formally. It also separated political functions from domestic ones arising out of headship of the family. The more powerful the chiefdom, the greater the separation of political action from the field of kinship relations. Sthanams indicated a development of specifically political functions, and of a complex political organisation.

## The Zamorins

The Zamorins, known as the Nediyiruppu svarupam from the village of their origin, originally ruled Ernad, an interior chiefdom just north of Valluvanad. They were Samanthan by caste, like the ruling families of the other

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1. Gough, 1950; Schneider and Gough, 1961, p. 324.

large interior chiefdoms of Valluvanad, Vadakkumkur and Tekkumkur in central Kerala. The Zamorins alone of these Samanthan chiefdoms - all rich in pepper - struck out towards the coast and succeeded in annexing the chiefdom of Polanad, probably before the establishment of Calicut city in the eleventh century.[1] There they founded, or developed, the port of Calicut which became their capital. And they conferred the title of Calicut Talacchanmar (i.e. a kind of mayor of Calicut) on the eldest male in the family of the wife of the dispossessed chief, who had made the annexation possible.[2] Ernad, their original territory, receded in importance, and was assigned to the holder of the second sthanam of the Zamorins. Other coastal chiefdoms - Pynad, Ramnad, and Cheranad - were also annexed, but we do not know when, nor from whom. The only clue to the acquisition of Cheranad is a statement made by the sixth sthani of the Zamorins to Buchanan, that it was given to his family by the Valluvanad raja for help against the northern Nayars.[3]

Pynad was obtained as a result of a marriage alliance with Kurumbranad.[4] The Polanad family is believed to have become the ruling family of Kadattanad.

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1. K.V.V. Ayyar, 1938, pp. 81-82.
2. Ibid, p. 82.
3. Buchanan, 1807.
4. K.V.V. Ayyar, 1938, p. 137.

The near-legendary history of Zamorin expansion from their original base in Ernad is confirmed by the kind of private estates recognised as their property by the British after 1792.[1] Their possessions in Ernad and Calicut are all devaswams (temple estates) - a traditional form of wealth. The vast estates they own in their own right, as secular property, are all located in territories traditionally recognised as later conquests, or subjugations. Devaswams and brahmaswams (Brahmin estates) were also acquired in the latter expansion. But the holdings in the original territories are not secular. This is an indication, if a faint one, that before the economic expansion of Kerala through overseas trade - which was the direct cause of the political expansion of the Zamorins, land ownership was bound up with ritual values, and chiefs were probably limited in the scope for competition as much by the more limited land-based economy as by the fact that much of the land was held by Brahmins and temples. One writer says, "Kshetra-sambandham or temple connection became the true sine qua non of kingship".[2] This is an extreme view of the importance of temples in early Kerala history, but it underlines their

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1. Ibid, Appendix, V, pp. 328-330.
2. S. Ramanatha Aiyar, 1938, p. 18.

role in the political system.

The Zamorins annexed some territories in the interior largely as a result of conflict with two powerful neighbours, Valluvanad and Palghat. This conflict lasted through the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. Economic interests were probably involved, as the Zamorin breakthrough to the sea gave them an edge over the other interior chiefdoms, who were caste equals. These latter however do not appear to have tried to follow the same policy of seaward expansion, but rather to cut down the Zamorins to size. They were however severely handicapped because of this. Valluvanad, by the end of the fifteenth century, ceased to be an effective rival. It asserted its equality of status, however, by carrying on what could be called a ritual of war against the Zamorins, at the twelve-yearly ritual known as the mahamakham. This ritual of war was scrupulously observed by Valluvanad upto the eighteenth century, when the mahamakham ritual was itself suspended.[1]

The Zamorins were aided by Moors in the conflict with Valluvanad. Their help gave the Zamorins an added advantage in the conflict. They provided an additional source of both armed force, and of financial resources. Their services

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1. See Chapter III.

were recognized by the assignment of special ritual roles in the mahamakham ceremony to Moorish leading men. For the Moors, military assistance to the Zamorins was an investment in the security of their trade in the Zamorin's territories.

The conflict with Valluvanad and with a southern Kshatriya neighbour, Cochin, was in some way bound up with an ancient conflict between two Brahmin factions.[1] The reforming faction, led by Panniyur gramam,[2] was supported by the Zamorins. The orthodox Chovvara faction was supported by Cochin and Valluvanad. How important the Brahmins actually were at this period, we do not know. Traditional histories are strongly coloured by Brahmin bias, and they claim that originally the Brahmins ruled Kerala. They gave up their power when they began to quarrel by joint decision. For they invited rulers from the east coast to govern for twelve-year tenures. This system is said to have lasted till the ninth century, when the ruler at the time partitioned Kerala among the several Kshatriya and Samanthan chiefs.[3]

The Brahmin factions may have resulted from the conflict of the chiefs, or at the least may have been aggravated by it. By the "European" period of Kerala's

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1. K.V.K. Ayyar 1938, pp. 97-101; K.P. Padmanabha Menon, Vol. I, 1924, p. 59.
2. Brahmin village.
3. The Keralolpatti history, detailed in K.V.K. Ayyar, and in Logan.

history, they had become largely legendary.

A pre-European conquest of the Zamorins was Nedunganad whose Samanthan chief called them in because his nobles were intriguing with Valluvanad and Palghat. The second sthani of the Zamorins, or Eralpad, led the campaign. He had to overcome various Nayars, two Patanayars, or army commanders, (one of whom led the Palghat army), a naduvazhi (district chief) of Valluvanad, and the Cheruma and Panan untouchables around Karimpuzha. These last were "conquered" by being won over. Combat, involving physical contact with the untouchables, was out of the question. The Valluvanad raja had a koyma right over Tiruvegappara temple, and some lands, which he had earlier taken from a Nayar chief. These were taken over by the Eralpad. Finally the Nedunganad chief himself was dispossessed, and granted instead a pension and a koyma right in Cherupulachery temple.

The Nedunganad campaign, though insufficiently documented, is more typical of pre-European Kerala warfare. Temple rights were important features in it. On the other hand, it is atypical insofar as the dispossession of a defeated chief was not a characteristic result of war in Kerala. The Zamorins, by a fortuitous expansion of overseas trade, were able to upset the political balance of the chiefdoms, and to make large annexations. Even so, in the course of nearly four centuries they had only annexed their

immediate neighbours on the coast, and expanded some way southwards at the expense of the smaller chiefs. In the sixteenth century, the Portuguese support to Cochin redressed the balance, and, though the Zamorins fought as fiercely as before, and they maintained, and even added to, their ring of dependent chiefs, there was no major annexation, or dispossession. The values of political behaviour strongly favoured a policy of "no dispossession". There are no written texts prescribing approved political behaviour between chiefs in Kerala, and there is no specific evidence that they were verbalised. But the breach of the "no dispossession" value, whether this was conscious or unconscious, did set in motion very strong forces of protest and armed hostility from the minor chiefs in the dispossessed chief's territory. Shaykh Zaynu'd-Din[1] commented on the moderation of the Zamorins in restoring defeated opponents, a comment probably based on contemporary values rather than on the actual facts. That the Zamorins were limited by some observance of this rule is evident from the limited expansion for the period covered. The expansion incorporated immediate neighbours - who would in any case be the most closely controlled in the cluster around the Zamorins - and stopped when it came up against powerful chiefdoms with chiefs of

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1. Zaynu'd-Din, 1942.

equal or higher caste, and themselves potential core chiefdoms, with their own spheres of influence.

The Zamorins took the first step towards centralisation by expanding territorially and displacing possible rivals. They did not, however, take the crucial next step of developing an administrative system which would allow for indefinite expansion, such as appointing new officials to govern additional territories, or establishing a uniform administration. They merely expanded the existing form of government. From two sthanams,[1] they developed six, at least three of which had definite territorial jurisdictions. Officials to administer the cities, perform ministerial functions, and command sections of the army, were all hereditary incumbents. They were in fact minor chiefs, who held their estates by inalienable right, but who by long subjection and tradition had become functionaries of the Zamorins.

The horizontal expansion was not matched by vertical consolidation, and this set a severe limit to the scope for political centralisation. We shall see later that Travancore succeeded, within a few decades, where the Zamorins failed in the ten centuries of their recorded history.

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1. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 9.

The Svarupam of the Zamorins was much less segmented than that of Kolattunad. Till 1792, it had split into only three kovilakams. (Gough[1] claims this split occurred after 1792. K.V.K. Ayyar[2] definitely dates it earlier. A first split had already occurred during the pre-Portuguese conflict with Valluvanad. A second one was not a split but the creation of a kovilakam by adoption, in 1707 A.D.). After 1792, only one of these three kovilakams has again segmented into three tavazhis[3] in the British period. The lack of greater segmentation may have been due to fewer numbers,[4] although the Zamorins only once had to resort to adoption, in the early eighteenth century. After 1792, they appear to have become prolific, with one of the kovilakams numbering 172 members, over eight generations living in one highly organised establishment.[5]

Why did the Zamorins segment less than the Kolasvarupam? Was the Samanthan family structure tighter than that of the Kshatriyas? Were the political stakes higher for the Zamorins? Gough[6] gives three reasons for which svarupams

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1. Gough, 1950.
2. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938.
3. Gough, 1950.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

segmented less than the taravads of high Nayars. One was the stake in political office and power, which would diminish with segmentation. The second was the remoteness from agricultural activity, giving the svarupam the character of a vast corporation whose member-families - the potential segments - either shared the proceeds and lived apart as in north Malabar, or lived in separate apartments in the same palace as in south Malabar. The third reason was the institution of sthanams which prevented conflict among influential elders by distributing royal power, and by separating them from their own member-families.

The difference in rate of segmentation between svarupams cannot be fully explained by the sthanams, nor by the corporation-like organisation, since these were common to most svarupams. There were however differences in power, in terms of both financial and military resources, between svarupams. If svarupams were in general more powerful than Nayar tarawads, not all svarupams were equally powerful. Some were more powerful than others, and the more powerful the svarupam, the less it segmented. The segmentation of Travancore, upto the eighteenth century, among collaterals of one svarupam was a symptom of its weakness. The lack of much segmentation in the Zamorin family was a symptom of its strength.

One other factor is of significance as well. The

less physically isolated a chiefdom was, the more it was likely to face opposition from neighbours. The extent and persistence of such opposition would inevitably affect segmentation. Cochin, for example, was not a powerful chiefdom, even after it gained European allies. The family did segment, and dissension among the branches was very common. Yet there was no outright partition of the territory as occurred in Kolattunad in the eighteenth century, and as is believed to have occurred at various times in the svarupams of Parappanad, Palghat, Kottayam-Kurumbranad, and Chavakkad.[1]

The cluster of chiefdoms that came under the influence of the Zamorins consisted of several Brahmin and Kshatriya svarupams as well as some Nayar and Nampati (that is, degraded Brahmin[2]) chiefs. The Kshatriya svarupams had recognised sthanams, though the number was smaller than that for the Zamorins. There was also some degree of segmentation. No details are available about sthanams in Brahmin svarupams, though at least one of them (Talapilly) segmented, into four branches. Nothing is known about the family structure and offices of the lesser Nayar and Nampati chiefs.

The Cochin-dominated cluster contained a number of

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1. Gough, 1950.
2. Local traditions say they were degraded but not outcasted-because they took up arms, and shed blood. They could be described as warrior Brahmins.

minor chiefs with titles such as kartav and kaimal on the north, and towards the south, minor chiefs called madampis along the coast, with quite substantial Samanthan chiefs to the south-east in the interior. It is of great interest that there are no Kshatriya chiefs under the Kshatriya chief of Cochin, but there are several Samanthans. This situation is exactly parallel to that of the cluster around the Zamorin, himself a Samanthan, who had several Kshatriya chiefs under him but no Samanthans.

The Kolattunad cluster was much looser than the two in central Kerala. The Kshatriya Kolasvarupam counted one Kshatriya chief in his sphere of influence, in Kottayam. This family were however, on the one hand said to be of foreign origin, and on the other were not in any respect actually controlled by the Kolasvarupam.

The absence of status equals in a position of super- and subordination is brought home forcefully in the structure of the fourth cluster, in Travancore. There, the five most important chiefs were collaterals, probably segments of the original Kshatriya svarupam. There was no system of ordination between the collateral chiefdoms upto the eighteenth century. When such ordination began to develop in the eighteenth century, it was finally established only by the abolition (through outright annexation) of the collateral chiefdoms by one of them. There was never a cluster of chiefdoms around

a core svarupam. First, there was a number of roughly equivalent and closely linked chiefdoms. This gave way to a well-integrated, centralised state, a modern kind.

## Chapter III

### Political Interactions of the Chiefdoms of Kerala

The history of the chiefdoms of Kerala upto the time of the Mysorean invasions is mainly a record of their wars with each other. No chiefdom of any importance which was in physical contact with others seems to have been either able or willing to avoid war. Even the Brahmin chiefdoms were not exempt. The major conflict from the Portuguese advent to the eighteenth century was between the Zamorins and Cochin. The wars fought by these two svarupams, and the involvement of their dependent chiefdoms, will be used to illustrate the causes of war in Kerala, the techniques of war, and the recognised and implicit rules that limited these wars.

Broadly, the causes of war can be divided into two categories, the ritual and the secular. Ritual causes pertained mainly to the rights, or koyma, enjoyed by svarupams over temples and their estates. Sometimes they related to special ritual observances, or objects. Secular causes pertained to acquisition of territory, competition for the profits of the overseas spice trade, protection of dependent chiefdoms, interference in the internal affairs of rival chiefdoms either in succession disputes or by giving support to a hostile faction. It is

thought by some writers that the European traders exacerbated wars between chiefs.[1] The evidence of tradition (Keralolpatti) and early Arab writers[2] is that the chiefdoms had always been at loggerheads. There was some change in the techniques of war, but none comparable to the much earlier introduction of gunpowder by the Arabs. They did, however, cause much of the conflict to centre on secular interests, especially trade, and conflicts over ritual rights and privileges became secondary. It must be pointed out that ritual rights involved economic interests, since temple estates were often vast reserves of landed wealth. But as commerce grew, and agriculture ceased to be the major source of wealth and especially of revenue to chiefs, conflicts became more clearly secular. Commerce, as we saw in Chapter II, was in the hands of non-Hindus, and was not tied in with considerations of ritual status or belief, as was agriculture.

There are specific references in the literature to wars over ritual matters between the Zamorins and Cochin. Some of these are pre-European, and known only through traditional histories. The earliest reference is to two factions of Nambudiris, led respectively by the reformist

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1. Schneider and Gough, 1961, p. 318.
2. Shaykh Zaynud-Din, 1942.

gramam[1] of Panniyur and the conservative gramam of Chovvara. The Zamorins were the champions of Panniyur, while their rivals, Cochin and Valluvanad, supported Chovvara. The Brahmin chief of Tirumanasserinad, of the Panniyur faction (not marked in English maps of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), was joined by the Zamorins, against Cochin and Valluvanad. During this war the Zamorins took from Valluvanad, with the help of the Moors, the control of Tirunavayi temple, though they allowed that one of the four managing trustees (uralans) be a representative of Valluvanad.[2] This was an immense ritual gain. The performance of the duodecennial mahamakham ceremony at Tirunavayi (discussed later in this chapter) conferred ritual prestige on the chiefly performer, as was the case in all major temple rituals. Since the temple was located in the southern annexations of the Zamorins, its control confirmed and legitimised these annexations. In another conflict (this time with Nedunganad), the Zamorin's heir, or second sthani, deprived the Valluvanad chief of his koyma right in Tiruvegappura temple,[3] which was in Nedunganad. On the other hand, when the chief of Nedunganad was dispossessed of his chiefdom, he was

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1. Nambudiri village.
2. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, p. 164.
3. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 124.

compensated with a pension and a koyma right in Cherupulacherry temple.[1]

The Pattinhattedam Nambudiri of Trichur was a very powerful Brahmin. He denied that Cochin had a melkoyma or 'overlord' right in Trichur's Vadakkunathan temple.[2] Trichur lay between Cochin and the Zamorin. The Nambudiri turned to the Zamorin in his quarrel and Trichur was, even in European times, a battlefield between the two chiefs.

The instances already cited probably date to two or three centuries before the Portuguese arrived. There were probably numerous such conflicts between other chiefs as well, but the material is sparse.

Shortly after the Portuguese arrived, in 1503, the Zamorin removed from Cochin a sacred stone used in the rituals of the svarupam, and placed it in the Brahmin chiefdom of Edapilly, which was hostile to Cochin. A member of the svarupam of Edapilly was believed to have given Mattancheri and Vypin[3] to his Kshatriya wife of Cochin, rousing the anger of his family. The hostility of the Edapilly svarupam to Cochin was explained by reference to this tradition.

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1. Ibid, p. 126.
2. Ibid, p. 129.
3. Adjacent to Cochin.

Some decades later, around 1536, the Cranganore chief asked Cochin to prevent the Zamorin from attending an annual Cranganore festival (related to the all-Kerala tradition of the ancient perumals or east coast rulers).[1] Cochin declined, in order not to let the Portuguese into Cranganore. The Zamorin, having won his way to this assembly, immediately decided to perform some rituals on the sacred stone he had placed in Edapilly. Cochin at once called for Portuguese help, and succeeded in getting back the stone before the monsoons brought the war to an end. The Portuguese used the war to obtain economic privileges from the Zamorin.[2]

The next war over ritual privilege occurred in 1579.[3] The Zamorin prevented Cochin from entering a temple near Cranganore. The matter was resolved by a war in which Cochin was defeated. The last such occurrence appears to be a war in 1742 between Cochin and the Zamorin over the management of Triprayar temple,[4] though we have no accessible details of this.

The competition for ritual privileges, as we saw, concealed economic and power motives. As commercial interests developed, providing the chiefs with sources of income addit-

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1. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1924, Vol. I, p. 501.
2. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, pp. 203-204.
3. Zaynu'd-Din, 1942, p. 92.
4. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 233.

ional to what they got in fees and duties from their agricultural 'subjects', ritual seems to have lost importance. There is, of course, the possibility that the largely European sources of Kerala history after the sixteenth century neglected to report wars, and aspects of wars, in which they were not directly involved. Had these been conspicuous, however, it is unlikely that they would be overlooked either by European chronicles or by the vested European interest in Kerala.

Among what have been called the secular causes of war, the intervention in succession disputes, and protection of a feudatory occur throughout Kerala's recorded, pre-British history. Succession disputes in particular were a fertile source of conflict both within chiefdoms and between the allies of the contending factions. The earliest reference[1] to a war over succession dates it to pre-Portuguese times, when the Cochin chiefship was disputed, and the Zamorin supported one faction in its claims.

Better authenticated succession disputes occurred from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, mainly in Cochin, but also in Kolattunad. We do not know of any such

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1. Ibid, pp. 129-130.

dispute in the Zamorin family. Travancore had a succession dispute in the eighteenth century, but this was in many ways aberrant, as we shall see in the section on Travancore.

The Cochin svarupam, when the Portuguese arrived, had already segmented into five tavazhis - Elaya, Matattinkal, Pallivirutti, Mutta, and Chaliyur. The first two became extinct by Visscher's time.[1] With such a prolific family, there were so many older men that when the senior male succeeded to the chiefship, he was usually an old man. He was then allowed to appoint a regent, a man from his own tavazhi, to rule for him. On the chief's death, the regent did not become chief, but had to retire to a temple and live as a recluse. The succession went to the rightful heir - the eldest male from among all five tavazhis. In 1510, the chief was an Elaya, a tavazhi friendly to the Portuguese. The latter therefore wanted his regent, also an Elaya, to become chief instead of retiring to a temple, as required by Cochin custom. They succeeded in keeping out the rightful heir, then a Mutta member, although the latter had the support of the Zamorin, Cochin nobles, and the Brahmins. For the next hundred and fifty years, the

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1. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1924, Vol. I, Visscher's letter No. IX, p. 4.

Elaya tavazhi kept the chiefship to itself.[1] A Kerala tradition claims that since the partition of Kerala in the ninth century, the Elaya tavazhi monopolised the succession because it alone had heirs at that time.[2] At some time during its Portuguese-supported monopoly, the Elaya chiefs created a sinecure sthanam, the Perumpatappu[3] Muppu, to be held by the senior male of the excluded tavazhis (who would normally be either chief or heir to the chiefship). This sthani was given the control of one nad, or district. The Elaya family was succeeded by a Matattinkal, to which it had given heirs in adoption in 1635. The two families thus merged. The Elaya had made adoptions before this from the Matattinkal, a wealthy tavazhi, as also from two other avarupams - the Villarvattam, which was either the ruling family of Crangamore[4] or a svarupam once located in the lands of Cochin's hereditary minister the Paliath Achan (that is, Nayar lord of Paliam), and absorbed by adoptions into the Paliam family.[5]

In the 1650s, the Elaya-Matattinkal tavazhis were in danger of extinction. They made adoptions from the

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1. Gough, 1950.
2. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1924, Vol. I, p. 480.
3. Family, i.e. village name of Cochin Svarupam.
4. Logan, 1887, Vol. 2, No. 7.
5. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1924, Vol. I, pp. 450-481.

three other tavazhis, and immediately a sharp dispute developed about the succession. The accounts of this dispute are not consistent.[1] It seems that the Pallivirutti adoptee was favoured by the Portuguese,[2] but this prince died.[3] A prince of the Chaliyur branch was recognised,[4] but again the Portuguese bypassed them and put through the adoptions of five princes of the Bettem svarupam.[5] All through, the Portuguese were determined to keep out the heir of the Mutta tavazhi, a branch that was involved very early in Portuguese hostility to its claims. The Mutta and Chaliyur princes had friends among the southern chiefs,[6] and the Mutta also had Zamorin support. When the Cochin chief died, the eldest Bettem adoptee was made chief with Portuguese and Cochin Nayar support. The Zamorin, in support of the Mutta heir, marched on Cochin, aided by the Brahmin chief of Edapilly (traditionally hostile to Cochin), and the Samanthan chiefs of Alangad, Vadakkumkur, and Tekkumkur, who were feudatories of Cochin. The Bettem-Cochin chief was aided by the Brahmin chiefs of Purakkad, Parur and Azhvancheri, the Samanthan chief of Valluvanad (traditionally hostile to the Zamorins), and the Portuguese. The Zamorin inflicted

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1. Gough, 1950; K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, pp. 215-216.
2. Gough, 1950.
3. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 215.
4. Gough, 1950.
5. Raja, 1953, p. 148.
6. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1924, Vol. I, p. 190.

a severe defeat on Cochin. Meanwhile, the Mutta prince had enlisted Dutch support at Colombo. The Portuguese now decided to accept the Mutta's claim, but reversed their decision on winning some successes. The Dutch were persuaded to give more support, the Purakkad Nayars were routed from Cochin, the Paliath Achan openly joined the Dutch, and the Chaliyur prince (the Mutta prince had died) was crowned chief by the Dutch. By 1663, the Portuguese had surrendered their power in Cochin to the Dutch.

The Dutch now favoured the Chaliyur tavazhi. They supported the chief's decision to adopt from Chaliyam in 1681, and this was effected in 1689.[1] Parur, Alangad, and Manakkulam[2] opposed the adoption, and the Nayars of Cochin again wanted a Bettem prince. The Zamorin supported the Dutch and Chaliyur, and Bettem's faction was defeated. A similar dispute again arose in 1710. This time the Ayirur Kshatriya family also opposed the Dutch-supported Chaliyur, because they had their own candidate for adoption. Cochin considered they had lost any such claim because they allowed the Murianad Nambiars to make an adoption from them. The Murianad Nambiars were not Kshatriyas.[3]

The last instance of a succession dispute in

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1. Alexander, 1946, p. 28.
2. One of the four branches of Talapilly's svarupam.
3. Padmanabha Menon, 1929.

independent Cochin occurred in 1752, when the heir to the sinecure Perumpatappu Muppu sthanam was denied his claim.[1] The sthanam, created over two centuries earlier by the Elaya tavazhis as a sop to the three excluded tavazhis of Cochin, persisted long after the Elaya became extinct, but we do not know what qualifications were now required of the heir. This time the aggrieved party turned to Travancore, and he was settled, with his tavazhis, on some conquered Cochin territory as a feudatory of Travancore, and lost it when Travancore became an ally of Cochin in 1757.

The rules of succession in a svarupam ideally integrated the segments - the kovilakams - in a common succession to the recognised sthanams, even where the kovilakams were separate residential and property-owning units. In Cochin, we find the rules manipulated by one segment which was more powerful than the others. Some historical interpretations of the rules of succession in Cochin point to an internal inconsistency which was an inevitable source of friction. The Perumpatappu Muppu was thought to be the first sthanam, and not a sinecure sthanam created for dispossessed branches of the family.[2] Also, it was thought to entail reclusion, whereas in the interpretation used above, it was the first sthanam's regent

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1. Gough, 1950.
2. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 128.

who became a recluse - presumably in order to prevent him from claiming the chiefship as of right, and he had no choice in the matter. The view that the first sthani was a recluse also says that this was so only when the incumbent was too old to rule effectively.[1] Another confusion in interpretation arises from the view[2] that whereas a recluse chief could set up a regent from his own tavazhi, this was not always the case. The second sthani might instead be entrusted with the functions of the chief. If there was a regent, he succeeded the recluse and not the eldest male. These explanations of Cochin's rules of succession, though seeming to explain the recurring disputes over the succession, do not take into account the way in which politics in the svarupam modified the rules. Once the Elaya tavazhi had established an exclusive right to the Cochin chiefship, with Portuguese support, there seem to have been no arguments about the legal rights of other claimants. Such claimants could make an effective bid for the succession only if they had strong outside support.

Succession disputes are also important in Kolattunad. These arose partly out of an imbalance of power among the branches of the Kolasvarupam. One branch, the Palli, and

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1. C. Achyutha Menon, quoted by K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 128.
2. Ibid.

especially its sub-branch, the Chirakkal, were supported by the English from their trading post in Tellicherry. By the middle of the eighteenth century the Chirakkal and the Udayamangalam branches, with British mediation, had partitioned Kolattunad.

The dissolution of the Kolasvarupam has also been attributed to a conflict between a chief's legal heirs, his sister's sons, and his natural heirs - his own sons.[1] The Cochin parallel makes it likely that European interference was equally to blame. The absence of territorial segmentation in the other powerful chiefdoms, where Europeans had little political influence, supports this argument. However in Kolattunad there did exist a conflict between a man's sons and his nephews. Paternity was more important here than in central and south Kerala. Succession everywhere passed through sisters, but in central and southern Kerala the joint family consisted of brothers and sisters and the latter's children, and men could not bequeath any part of the family property to their children, who were members of another joint family. In north Kerala, men set up homes with their wives and children. These children inherited from the mother's family, to which they might return as adults. They could also inherit from the father. Most of the chiefs

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1. Innes, 1908, pp. 57-58.

in the Kolattunad cluster are believed to be descendants of women with Kolattunad husbands. Nilesvaram is said to have been given by a Kolathiri to the descendants of a prince from his family and his Zamorin wife. Kadattanad was given by a Kolattunad prince to his Nayar wife from Polanad (conquered by the Zamorin). Pynad, part of the Zamorin's territories, is said to have been given by a Kurumbranad chief to his Zamorin wife - to the resentment of other branches of his svarupam. The Chuzhali and Neriyot Nambiars claim descent from the Nayar wives of a Kolattunad prince. According to Gough,[1] these traditions have not been historically confirmed. That they are tenable is supported by two facts. Firstly, the Nayars of this area even now practice virilocal marriage with matrilineal succession. Secondly, we have a historical instance of such an occurrence, though this did not lead to the establishment of a new chiefdom.

In 1749, a Chirakkal prince married the sister of the Kadattanad chief. With this brother's consent, he built a palace for his son by her in the territory of feudatory chiefs, in Iruvalinad. Finding these chiefs hostile, he gained the support of Kadattanad and the English to war on Iruvalinad, and to compel its Nambiars, among other things, to provide facilities for the maintenance of his

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1. Gough, 1950.

son's palace. He also wanted to provide a fief for this son.[1] A new head of the English trading post at Tellicherry tended to favour the rival branch of the Kolasvarupam[2] - which had partitioned Kolattunad with the Chirakkal family, and upset his plans. There is no evidence that his son got a fief.

In Travancore sons were, as everywhere in Kerala, not legal successors to office and ancestral property. Nor were they permissive inheritors as in the north. In the eighteenth century however, the succession of Martanda Varma was disputed by his mother's brothers' sons. The latter won support from an east coast patrilineal power on the grounds that they were the legal successors. When the general of the eastern army was given an explanation by Martanda Varma of the rules of matrilineal succession current in Kerala, he withdrew his support of the contenders. This situation arose not out of any internal inconsistency in the recognised rules, but from the manipulation of 'foreign' support by appealing to 'foreign' values.

Wars to protect vassals or allies were frequent. The pre-Portuguese Zamorins acquired control of Tirumavayi temple and its mahamakham ritual in a war with Valluvanad

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1. Records of Fort St. George, Tellicherry Letters, Vol. XI, 1749-50, letter No. 47.
2. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, p. 387.

which they entered initially at the request of the Brahmin chief of Tirumanasserinad. In Nedunganad, they were called in by the Samanthan chief because some of his nobles were intriguing with Valluvanad and Palghat. The deliberate involvement by warring chiefdoms of neighbouring or interested chiefs into their wars - as protectors, as allies, or to serve mutual interests - is a constant theme of Kerala history. The clusters described in Chapter II were themselves the results of such manoeuvres, their persistence arising out of the relatively constant interests of the chiefdoms, and the lack of any major shifts in the balance of power.

The Portuguese, in 1519, noted a 'duel' between a Cochin noble and a dependent of the Zamorin. Each side put out four thousand men,[1] and the ensuing battle was intended to spark off a major war between Cochin and the Zamorin. (We are not told who initiated this incident).

The Portuguese themselves worked through the existing system of political alliance and conflict. Afonso Dalboquerque asked the Cochin chief to "attack some place in the interior" or "at least he should write to some lord of the mountainous country, who was on amicable terms with him, to carry out such a manoeuvre...."[2] The Cochin chief pleaded that "he went there for four or five months every year, and

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1. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, pp. 322-323.
2. D'Alboquerque, Vol. I, p. 54.

hereby expended all the revenues which he obtained from Cochin, and that... the rivers could not be passed, but nevertheless he would write to certain lords his vassals and friends, to commence the war in the interior frontier country",[1] which he did. The Zamorin had to leave Calicut with very few defences to fight the "lord of the mountainous country". The Portuguese, however, failed to take Calicut.

In 1550, a long and bitter war developed in central Kerala. The Samanthan chief of inland Vadakkumhur asked the Zamorin to adopt his brother to the fourth sthanam of the Zamorins.[2] He visited the Zamorin to negotiate the matter, and soon after his return was invaded by Cochin. The Vadakkumkur chief was a feudatory of Cochin. His negotiations with the Zamorin for an adoption were quite valid since both families were Samanthans. Obviously such an adoption threatened Cochin's suzerainty, however nominal, over Vadakkumkur. In addition, Vadakkumkur was rich in pepper, and was known to the Portuguese as the near fabulous chiefdom of Pimenta. They also shared Cochin's interest in keeping Vadakkumkur out of the Zamorin camp.

The war was an unusually bitter one. The Cochin invaders burnt the chief to death in his palace. In doing

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1. Ibid, pp. 54-55.
2. Zaynu'd-Din, 1942.

this they invoked a severe sanction of retaliation, which was an accepted custom in warfare. The death of a prince and the burning of a palace must be avenged, even if it was only some years later and at the cost of many other lives. The immediate effect of the burning of the Vadakkumkur chief was that the Vadakkumkur forces rallied together and drove out the Portuguese and Cochin men. At the same time five thousand men, known as chavers, entered Cochin to kill the prince responsible for the death of their chief.[1] They killed him in 1561.

The Zamorin entered the war for Vadakkumkur, with eighteen chiefs. These included some of his more powerful Kshatriya feudatories in Bettem and Kurumbranad, and the Nayar chiefs of Mangat (the Zamorin's minister) and Kavalappara, and allies like Purakkad's Brahmin chief. They marched on the capital, and three Cochin chiefs, successively, were killed in battle. In 1567 hostilities continued between Cochin and Vadakkumkur, and though Cochin, with Portuguese support, was on the whole successful, the Vadakkumkur forces succeeded in killing in battle the Cochin chief and two nephews, and a fortnight later the successor.

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1. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1924, Vol. I, p. 503, quoted from F.C. Danvers, 'The Portuguese in Asia'.

The stakes in the Vadakkumkur war were high. Cochin did not have an extensive hinterland of its own, and could thus not afford to lose control of Vadakkumkur. An adoption between the Zamorin and Vadakkumkur would mean loss of influence and power to Cochin. It would also mean the diversion of Vadakkumkur's large pepper supplies to the Zamorin's ports. There the Portuguese interest coincided with that of Cochin. Hence the long and bitter war.

The institution of chavers, or martyrs, who avenged a chief's death, will be discussed later in this chapter, in the context of the mahamakkam ritual in which it played a dramatic part, and in the context of the rules by which warfare in Kerala was generally contained within such limits as to prevent disruption of the social and political system.

Apart from the extreme violence of the Vadakkumkur war, and its use of chavers, it is a fairly typical instance of how political alignments were used, and wars extended beyond the original dispute. A war was fought not only on the immediate issue, but over long term interests, and the interests of the supporting chiefdoms.

The European interference in the politics of the chiefdoms made some difference insofar as commercial interests became important. Territorial acquisition was a relatively unimportant factor in wars. The first chiefs to go in for

it in a big way were the Zamorins, and this is at least partly explained by the influence and the support of the Moors. These territorial wars came to an end when the Portuguese arrived, and threw their support behind the chiefs of Cochin.

The Zamorins now fought commercial wars with the Portuguese themselves, especially on the seas. Territorial acquisition again became important only in the eighteenth century, in Travancore.

Among themselves, the chiefs fought for real power in men and money and influence, including alliances with the Europeans. These were, however, inextricably mixed up with quarrels over ritual privilege, and the latter might be a thin disguise for a competing interest in real resources. In 1503, the Zamorin invaded Cochin, and made a straightforward demand that the Portuguese men left behind for the monsoons by their leader be handed over. Some moral arguments were also put forward, probably instigated by the Moorish memory of Christian-Muslim conflict in southern Europe. He tried to strengthen his hand by bringing up the traditional quarrel between Edapilly and Cochin, whereby the former's Brahmin chief claimed that parts of Cochin island had been theirs, and were wrongfully given to Cochin as a result of a sambandham[1]

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1. Common-law marriage.

marriage between the two families.

A Cochin chief and two princes died in battle and Cochin was destroyed, but the Zamorin withdrew when the Portuguese fleet reappeared. Two hundred men from Cochin set out for Calicut, and killed and were killed till the last one died outside Calicut, with the revenge incomplete.

Eighteen years later, in 1521, when the Portuguese had concluded a peace with the Zamorin, there was no overt reason to start a war. The Cochin chief however, anxious to foul the peace, decided that he must avenge the 1503 killings and the destruction of Cochin, as required by Kerala custom. The custom decreed the use of chavers, and not war. Cochin however, decided to fight and was defeated, but succeeded in sabotaging the Zamorin-Portuguese peace.

Apart from the wars with the Europeans (whether Portuguese, Dutch, English or French) purely territorial wars-of-conquest - with neither ritual privileges involved, nor ties of political allegiance - were fought only by Martanda Varma of Travancore. He annexed to his nad, or district, all the chiefdoms to the north upto Cochin proper, and established an alternative form of government responsible directly to him. These were wars fought to win, and did not fit the patterns of contained warfare followed in Kerala upto the early eighteenth century.

To use the term "contained warfare" is to postulate

limits, or rules, of containment. These limits are not necessarily set down in a manual of war, nor are they even always recognised customary prescriptions. Various factors in the ecology, the economy, the system of stratification and its division of labour, beliefs about status and about sacred things, could (and did) limit or contain warfare.

Specific rules of war, generally accepted in Kerala, decreed that sufficient notice of intent to fight be given. Surprise attacks were not honourable, and the hour of attack was fixed by astrological calculation, and not expediencey.[1] In 1504, in a war against Cochin for example, "The Brahmins with the Zamorin finally appointed Thursday, the 7th. May, for the last attack".[2]

During a battle, chiefs of both sides were protected by a severe sanction of retaliation should they be killed. Chiefs did get killed, and revenge was sought by chavers of the aggrieved chiefdom. But the killing of chiefs was not a feature of wars as it was, for example, in Rajasthan. There, war was a way to reduce the number of claimants to chiefdoms.[3] The Kerala chiefs were more concerned to ensure the continuity of the family. Their families avoided segmentation for as long as possible - at times a few hundred

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1. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 175.
2. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, p. 311.
3. Dutra, 1958, pp. 136-137.

years - unlike the chiefly lineages of Rajasthan. There was no fear arising out of a multiplicity of heirs. This was resolved by the provision of a multiplicity of sthanams in each chiefly family - but there was a constant fear of extinction. "It has never been heard that any one of the junior brothers or sons of maternal aunts have slain one who was senior in age so that he may soon succeed to the throne".[1] Frequent adoptions ensured that "The line of their heirs is... never broken".[2]

The obligation to avenge the death of a chief or a prince, and the burning of a chiefly palace, while ~~they~~ it did not prevent such destruction, nevertheless made it dangerous to kill chiefs in war, or to burn their palaces. The men (usually from a chief's own army and his personal body-guard) were sworn to avenge his death even at the cost of their own lives. They had to kill a chief or prince of the enemy, usually the one responsible for the death of their own. It sometimes took years for them to exact vengeance. They, that is, their families, were given tax-free lands known as chavittu-virutti from which they were known as chavers.[3]

The chavers contributed to chiefly continuity by making it dangerous to kill members of chiefly lineages.

By custom, Nayar nobles could not be punished by

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1. Zaynu'd-Din, 1942, Chapter III.
2. Ibid.
3. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1924, Vol. I, footnote on pp. 510-511. Logan derives the term from Chava, that is, death, and Eruka that is, to arise - 'those who went forth to death'. 1887, Vol. II, p. CLXXIV.

their chiefs for defection or rebellion.[1] They could only be brought to heel by war. There was therefore no crime of treason. The right of Nayar nobles to fight at will set a limit to the accretions of power of any chief. If he became too powerful and endangered the existence of his nobles, they could desert to - or at least flirt with - a rival and so restore the balance. Since a chief's military resources were an agglomerate of the Nayar levies of his nobles, their defection automatically reduced his strength to par. Nayar soldiers in Cochin could be punished for treason if they fought the chief. The procedure was for their assembly (kuttam) to meet and register a protest. The chief sent his men to provoke a battle which ended in the rebels' punishment if they lost, their desertion if they won.[2]

Kerala chiefs were also required not to dispossess defeated chiefs of their traditional territories. They might whittle away the power of a chief by winning or forcing away his feudatories, and by refusing him some of the recognised privileges of svarupams, such as coining money. They might even annex some of his territories. But the chief was left with most of his ancient chiefdom. When Cochin protested at the alliance of the Portuguese with his enemy, the Zamorin, Afonso d'Albuquerque countered,

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1. Panikkar, 1960, p. 235.
2. Miller, 1950.

"... if either of us has anything to complain of I am the one... if I have not destroyed the Zamorin it is solely because you, and the King of Cananor, whenever you see he is worsted, help him with your forces, and send him ships laden with supplies, sailing under safe-conduct from the King, my lord; for you wish that this argument should be always going on;..."[1] Even after this,..." both he and the King of Cananor, in order to obstruct this business, did not break off their communication with the Caimais and the lords of the Malabar territory. All this Afonso Dalboquerque learned afterwards..."[2]

This rule, broken first by the Zamorins during their pre-Portuguese expansion, was broken again by Travancore in the eighteenth century. The Travancore chiefs made a complete break with the 'no dispossession, no annexation' rule,[3] and brought into existence a form of government totally different even from that of the similarly motivated Zamorins.

Quite as important as the recognised traditions relating to war, the system of values on the one hand, and the social and political system on the other, limited warfare.

Beliefs were held throughout Kerala about the sanctity of Brahmins and of temples, and about the pollution conveyed

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1. Ibid, p. 71.
2. Dalboquerque, Vol. IV, p. 69.
3. Panikkar, 1960, p. 236.

by untouchable castes. War strategy had to be fought with due regard to these beliefs. We have several examples of how these beliefs affected the course of a war.

The Portuguese, planning an attack on Calicut, were told by Cochin's Brahmin spies that the Zamorin "had gone to an interior country to a war which was raging there, but in the city itself there were few Naires, and on the Cerame, or jetty, they had made some wooden stages on which were placed six large bombards, and along the beach many holes had been dug, in order that the men as they landed should fall into them, and that on the side of the houses of the Macuas[1] there was not a single breastwork".[2] The Portuguese thought it "best to land in front of the houses of the Macuas, for there the water was smoothest and all could land with least trouble".[3] All Kerala chiefs were equally bound to avoid Mukkuvans, and the Zamorin thought no fortifications were needed here. The Portuguese however were not bound by the ritual prescriptions of Kerala's castes, and the loophole in the Zamorin's defences was obviously of strategic value to them.

Untouchables were also avoided in war. Nayars could not fight untouchable soldiers, and where occasional

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1. i.e. Mukkuvans, caste of fishermen, and untouchables.
2. D'Alboquerque, Vol. I, p. 58. Italics mine.
3. Ibid, p. 65.

instances of such a possibility arose, as in the pre-Portuguese Zamorin conquest of Nedunganad, they negotiated a settlement rather than fight. A Kerala tradition says that the Zamorins ordered that one child in every Mukkuvan family be converted to Islam.[1] Muslims largely manned Calicut's navy, and the Zamorins could use converted Mukkuvans in the navy. Either unconverted Mukkuvans were unwilling to serve in a Muslim navy, or the Zamorins were unwilling to let them serve.

The role of untouchables in war is well illustrated in an incident in the 1504 war between the Zamorins and Cochin with its Portuguese allies. When the Zamorin tried to cross a ferry into Cochin, "a curious incident, possible only in Indian warfare, occurred, for a band of Cherumar, who were there busy working in the fields, plucked up courage, seized their spades and attacked the men who had crossed. These, being more afraid of being polluted by the too near approach of the low-caste men than by death at the hands of Pacheco's men,[2] fled precipitately.

"Pacheco expressed strong admiration of the Cherumars' courage and wished to have them raised to the rank of Nayars. He was much astonished when told that this could not be done".[3]

Brahmins on the other hand were protected by their

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1. Miller, 1950.
2. A Portuguese and his men.
3. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, p. 311.

ritual purity. To kill a Brahmin was a crime punishable by death. Brahmins were also thought to be protected by the deities. Travancore, expanding northwards in the first half of the eighteenth century, was not immediately successful against the Brahmin chief of Purakkad, because the Travancore troops feared the anger of his protecting deity. Purakkad was finally annexed by intrigue. Brahmin chiefs formed a small and politically unimportant proportion of all the chiefs of Kerala. Their relative immunity - some Brahmin chiefs were politically (that is, militarily), active though they then tended to have a lower ritual status - did not soften conflicts between other chiefs, nor did it give these chiefs any significant mediatory, sanctuarial, or other function beyond that inherent in their ritual status as Brahmins. The sanctity of the Brahmin, whether chief or otherwise, was however a value held by all.

A Dutch comment on the chiefdom of Edapilly confirms the ritual sanctity and privileges of Brahmin chiefs. Moens wrote, "... it is expedient to know that this little state is a kind of asylum, like a free town, to which people who are afraid of persecution and punishment retreat, and where they are safe; and more especially when they are able to reach a temple or pagoda there. This privilege is acknowledged and respected by all Malabar kings. However I never could find out on what right or grounds this privilege is based, unless

it be that this state obtained this privilege as a matter of course on account of its ruler being priestly and very pious chief of the principal priestly caste among the natives. .....Nevertheless I would never suffer the Native Christians who have committed crimes and retreated to that little state to be considered to be in an asylum, partly because the country would become full of thieves and murderers... and partly because it seems to me not proper that Roman Christians should have recourse to heathen idols and temples. ....On the other hand, I once had a Canarese brought back from Repolim,[1] who having greatly injured a Christian had retreated to that place, partly because the crime was too great and too well-known, and partly to show that we are not at all bound to respect this assumed privilege. However the less this happens the better, because in case it was too often repeated, it would scandalise the native kings. If on account of necessity one has occasionally to recourse to such a measure, one ought to give strict orders not to approach the temples, and still less to enter them in order to arrest the fugitive. He should only be arrested when he is outside the pagoda's limits".[2]

Manipulation of ritual values paid dividends to foreign armies. The Portuguese landing near Mukkuvan houses

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1. Portuguese term for Edapilly.
2. Quoted in Padmanabha Menon, 1929, Vol. II, pp. 76-77.

has already been cited. Tippu Sultan, in 1783, was able to force the Zamorin out of the Palghat fort simply by exposing the heads of Brahmins to his view. Even Hindus, if they were non-Malayali, might ignore Kerala ritual values as where the Nayaks of Madura sacked and burned Sucindram devaswam which in Travancore was a recognised sanctuary.

The exclusive monopoly of a hereditary caste over the arts of war was also a vital factor in contained warfare. This is discussed more fully in Chapter V, largely in relation to political systems characterised by dispersal of power. The hereditary caste of warriors was known as Nayars. Each chiefdom tended to have its own sub-caste of Nayars. There were Vellodu Nayars - of Valluvanad, Eradi Nayars from Ernad, with a small high status sub-caste in both areas known as Kiriyattil Nayars, and a similar high status sub-caste of Vellayma Nayars in Cochin. Each chiefdom drew its soldiers from the locally resident sub-caste of Nayars.

Because no other men could be recruited as soldiers, the Nayars, through their village (desam) assemblies or through their chiefdom (nad) assemblies, exercised considerable influence. Policy decisions were not disputed by them, unless they involved such widely held values as the sanctity of Brahmins. But they could present grievances about conditions of service, including wages due for active service, or oppressive control by a chief. Their economic independence

of their military leaders - village headmen or chiefs - limited the capacity of the latter to use them for the furtherance of their own policies. There were, however, no organised or regular relations between Nayars of different chiefdoms. They all fitted in roughly at the same status level vis-a-vis Brahmins above and untouchables below. But communications were limited to armed encounters, and probably to stray individual contacts. Such stray contacts might arise out of a pilgrimage by a chief and his family. Travancore's eighteenth century adoptions from Kolattunad were arranged when members of the latter family happened to be in Travancore on a pilgrimage. Nayars did not therefore check chiefly power by the threat of a horizontal combination across chiefdom frontiers - which would be a revolutionary situation. Rather, they used their local organisations, their economic independence, and their monopoly of the 'occupation' of war as a check on chiefs.

Wherever it was possible for a chief to find an alternative source of recruitment, there was an immediate disturbance in the balance of power. The Zamorin expansion before the sixteenth century was carried out largely with the help of the Moors. The centralisation of Travancore became viable only when the chief broke the power of his Nayars (known as Pillais) and recruited soldiers from a low caste, the Maravas, of the east coast. Although the

Nayars were effective only within their residential chiefdoms, the general effect on Kerala policy was to maintain a relative equality of chiefdoms, at different levels. Their local power set a ceiling on the development of the local chiefdom.

In the absence of good communications, chiefs could not go far afield to find soldiers. Within their chiefdoms they could not recruit from other castes without creating a serious disequilibrium both in the status system and its ritual values, and in the nicely balanced economic system.[1] The armies of Kerala chiefs were never pliable instruments of chiefly policy and ambitions, and insofar as they formed one status category in Kerala - wedged in ritually, politically, and economically, between other status categories - they functioned as keepers of the whole system, and provided no avenues for a change in the system.

Contained warfare, we shall see in Chapter V, is a necessary factor in the dispersal - or non-centralisation - of power.

## The rituals of Kerala

Some of the major rituals of Kerala had a strong political content. Some of these rituals were performed by and for chiefs, for example the Ariyittuvalcha (throwing of rice) or succession ritual, performed by the Zamorins, Cochin,

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1. See Chapter II, system of land tenure.

and Valluvanad. Other rituals were actually temple ceremonies which underlined on the one hand, the ritual distinctions between castes,[1] on the other the power of the chief - as in the annual Bhagavathi festival in Angadipuram, in the Valluvanad chief's Tirumannamkunnu temple.[2] The mahamakham ceremony, performed every twelve years at Tirunavayi by the Zamorin, was more conspicuously a portrayal of the chief's power than of the ritual distinctions between castes. This could be attributed to the bias of the records - documents of the Zamorin's family, or non-anthropological European interpretations. Yet the twelve years between ceremonies make it likely that the mahamakham did not run to the pattern for annual temple festivals, and that it was indeed largely a Zamorin ritual, rather than a Tirunavayi one.

Travancore, after its spectacular political career of centralisation, undertook a murajapam ceremony which was not a recurrent festival like the mahamakham or Valluvanad's Bhagavati festival.

All these festivals will be discussed except the Cochin ariyittuvalcha which has not been described in any

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1. Bhadrakali festival in a Coorg village, ref. Srinivas, 1952, pp. 186-202, although Srinivas interprets the village festival as an aspect of village solidarity rather than as separation of castes.
2. Miller, 1950.

of the histories. The temple festivals and succession rituals of other chiefdoms are not sufficiently known.

## The Zamorin's Ariyittuvalcha[1]

The death ceremonies, or tiruvantali, of a Zamorin were performed wherever he died - usually Zamorins appear to have died in Ponnani, or in Trichur or Cranganore. Participants in these ceremonies were male collaterals of the chief, Brahmins, and Attikkurissis, or Sudra funeral priests who attended on Nayars. The tiruvantali was a domestic ritual, not a political one. The period of death pollution to be observed was fourteen days, and this was utilised to make preparations for the succession of the new Zamorin, which was a much larger affair. The succession ritual of ariyittuvalcha was performed in the town where the old Zamorin had died, and ended with a journey to Calicut and further rituals there.

The business of government during the fourteen days was attended to by the hereditary chief minister, the Mangat Achan. Two Nambudiris attended to the correspondence. The heir, the branches of the family, Nambudiris and all those who were expected to attend the ariyittuvalcha, were informed by letter that the Zamorin had died of rheumatism - the

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1. Based on K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, pp. 17-35.

unvarying official cause of death, though he may have died of some other complaint.

At the ariyittuvalcha itself there were present both invitees and participants.

The participants included Nambudiri Brahmins of high status, sthanis of the chiefdom but not branches of the chiefly family, hereditary officials of the chiefdom, palace officials, and some - not all - feudatories.

The Azhvancheri Tamprakkal, a leading Nambudiri, came to the town but stayed away from the ceremony. The Zamorin had to visit him, and make the genuflections appropriate to the latter's high ritual status. Other Nambudiris had specific functions in the ritual.

The sthanis each received recognition in the ritual. The presiding Brahmin whispered to each one the incantation appropriate to the sthanam. All were expected to escort the new Zamorin for part of the journey to Calicut. One sthanam, the second, or Eralpad, grew in importance as vice-chief in Nedungamad. This was reflected in the development of a separate ariyittuvalcha for the succeeding Eralpad, in Nedunganad itself. This followed the Zamorin's ariyittuvalcha, of which it was a small-scale replica. His escorts were local Nayar nobles, and only one important Nambudiri attended.

Hereditary officials of the Zamorins, and their palace officials, carried out the major part of the ritual.

The Mangat Achan (minister), Dharmoth Panikkar (instructor in arms), and Tinayancheri Elayatu (ordnance commander) had specific roles. The Mangat Achan had to act out the departure of the ancestor of a Nayar who had rebelled during a period of mourning for a Zamorin, when arms were normally laid down. This is a highly ritualised performance, and the Nayar in question is not one of the Zamorin's important feudatories, and nothing is known of the family's position when it had rebelled. This part of the ariyittuvalcha is a dramatisation of a traditional historical event. On an analogy with Gluckman's analysis of rituals of rebellion in Africa, this could be interpreted as an enactment of the hostility of small Nayar nobles - probably desavazhis - to the Zamorin. The ritual, however, involves only one of the several Nayar nobles. It provides for no release of tension for potential rebels. On the contrary, it unequivocally confirms the over-riding power of the Zamorins over his Nayars; such power consisting of the ability to suppress armed revolt rather than in the imposition of authority.

Palace officials included the masseur, the jewel keeper, the astrologer, and others. These were also hereditary officials. The rituals they performed have no political content. They themselves belonged to castes of low status and specialised occupation, and did not participate significantly in the sphere of power relations, nor in the

structure of authority within chiefdoms or villages, nor even in essential economic activity.

The Zamorins controlled and influenced a larger number of lesser chiefdoms than the three other major chiefdoms of Kolattunad, Cochin, and Travancore. But only two of these played a part in the ariyittuvalcha rituals. These were the Kshatriya chief of Bettem and the Brahmin chief of Punattur. The latter had always been a close ally, but Bettem had frequently sided with the Portuguese, and one chief even became a Christian. (The only other direct conversion in Kerala was that of a Parappanad chief, forcibly, by Tippu Sultan. The chief of Cananore, the only Muslim chief in Kerala, is believed to have been a Nayar originally, but his conversion is very far back in history, and is based only on tradition).

Punattur and Bettem lay along the Zamorin's southern boundary, close to Cochin's northern boundary. This was roughly the area where Cochin and the Zamorin, at last from Portuguese times, and probably earlier, fought out most of their battles. This accounts for the singling out of Punattur and Bettem for the ariyittuvalcha. Their ritual duties were few, and not of a kind to emphasise political participation of ritually unequal chiefs. The Zamorin and Bettem together entered the tank for a purificatory bath. Or, both Bettem and Punattur held the hands of the Zamorin

during the final dinner. The ritual role of these high caste chiefs was a formal confirmation of a strategic alliance. They were weaker than the Zamorin, but unlike the rebellious Nayar family, whose punishment is ritually enacted in the ariyittuvalcha, they were treated as important allies. Svarupams could not be punished for desertion or rebellion.

The invitees, as distinct from participants, included almost everyone who was anything in the Zamorin's own territories, and, at a higher level, in all Kerala.

Outside invitees included the chiefly svarupams, Brahmins, and minority interests such as a Tamil Brahmin, some Chettis (traders from the east coast), a Roman Catholic bishop, Muslim priests, and the English factor of Tellicherry. The invited Brahmins were leading Nambudiris of Kerala, including heads of the major temples of Tirunavayi, Trichur, Taliparamba, and Chittur.

The svarupams invited from outside the Zamorin cluster included the northern chiefdoms of Kolattunad, Nilesvaram, Kottayam, and Kadattanad - with whom the Zamorins had a largely indifferent relation. They also included Travancore, Kayamkulam, and Pantalam - so far south that again relations were, till the eighteenth century, indifferent. Vadakkumkur came because of links through adoption with the Zamorins, and a common interest in opposing Cochin.

The chiefs conspicuously absent were Palghat,

Valluvanad, and Cochin, all neighbours to the Zamorins and involved in intense conflict with them. Valluvanad and Cochin did, however, get invited from 1937 onwards - nearly a century and a half after the chiefs had lost their chiefdoms to the British!

Other svarupams that came were to a greater or lesser degree within the Zamorin's cluster, and included Brahmin, Kshatriya and Nayar chiefs, but no Samanthans. The only Samanthans in the list are Nilesvaram and Vadakkumkur (see above) with both of whom the Zamorins had kinship links.

From the Zamorin's own territories came Nambudiri janmis, Nayar nobles, and Nampatis, or warrior Brahmins. These constituted an economic aristocracy, as the major landowners; through them the Zamorins built up their armies as well as exercised the authority of a naduvazhi, or chief. (See section on 'Government of the Chiefdoms'in this chapter). These men represented the local territorial units of which the Zamorin's chiefdom was constituted.

The last category of invitees included officials of different grades. Most of these had some role in the ariyittuvalcha. They were all hereditary officials. The highest grade included the ministers Mangat Achan and Cheruli Achan (minister to the second sthani), the Dharmoth Panikkar, the Tinayancheri Elayatu, the Talachhanmars or administrators of Calicut and Aliparamba, and the Karnavappad (from Karnavan-head of taravad; pad =authority) of Manjeri, and Tirumulpad

(of chiefly status, but not a chief, either Samanthan or Kshatriya) of Nilambur. These high grade officials were equal to the smaller chiefs. They held large hereditary estates, with their own armed Nayars, and an almost independent internal jurisdiction. Traditionally however, they performed administrative or other functions for the Zamorins. Most of them were Nayars of higher sub-caste.

Low-grade officials - also hereditary, and again, largely participant - were palace staff. They were probably of Nayar caste, but had neither the estates nor the powerful offices of the higher officials. Besides these there were ritual functionaries, drummers, an astrologer, and a low-caste funeral priest. The Zamorin's personal army, the Lokar (or Ten Thousand), and some Moplahs also attended the ariyittuvalcha.

After the ariyittuvalcha rituals were completed, the Zamorin signed olas (palm leaves) declaring his assumption of the four chiefly rights of amkam (trial by battle), chumkam (collection of customs), kappalottam (navigation), and panamati (minting). The Zamorin also confirmed his higher officials in their offices. Since these were hereditary, such confirmation was in the nature of a formal recognition of these offices, and of the re-establishment of the custpmary relations of the Zamorin to the officials. Like the olas for the Zamorin's assumption of the chiefly privileges, this act of confirmation expressed the continuity

of the chiefship and its attendant offices, after the fourteen-day suspension of government, and the change of personnel. Confirmation was also required for the succession to these offices.

Valluvanad chiefs also celebrated an ariyittuvalcha for a succeeding chief. Participants in this ritual were the hereditary officials of Valluvanad, the major desavazhis, the leading local Nambudiri, and some leading Kerala Nambudiris,[1] at least one of whom had an important role in the Zamorin's ariyittuvalcha as well. Valluvanad, though always independent itself, did not, in historical times, have any feudatories. The ariyittuvalcha was therefore mainly a Valluvanad affair. We do not know who attended it, but it is doubtful if it attracted as many Kshatriya, Brahmin, and Samanthan chiefs as the Zamorins.

Temple festivals in the temples of the chiefs reflected ritual values as well as the power of the chiefs. This was so in the annual festival in the Valluvanad chief's Bhagavati temple. This festival, lasting six months, was inaugurated in the house of the local Nambudiri (also an ariyittuvalcha participant), moved in succession to other temples, and culminated in an eleven-day festival in the

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1. Miller, 1950.

chief's temple. Here the ritual carefully separated groups of castes according to their degree of purity. Parts of the ritual emphasised the power of the chief.

The Valluvanad festival is the typical one. Among the Coorgs too, major festivals underlined the ritual distinctions between the castes.[1] The absence of political content from them is attributable to the changed political system at the time of observation.

A more unusual festival was the mahamakham, celebrated by the Zamorins at the Tirunavayi temple. This was performed once in twelve years, when Jupiter entered the sign of Leo. Some Zamorins performed it a second time when Jupiter was in Cancer,[2] as did the reigning Zamorin in 1694 and 1695.[3] In the year preceding a mahamakham another ceremony, the Tai Puyam, was performed. It was an elaborate and expensive ceremony and could, as in the duplicated mahamakham, provide scope for a conspicuous display of wealth and power. Appropriately, the last mahamakham was performed in 1743. The power of the Zamorins, by 1755 when the next celebration was due, had suffered severe blows from the expanding Travancore state, followed by the Mysore invasions from which it never recovered.

A full description of the mahamakham performed in

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1. Srinivas, 1952; see above, p.166
2. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 104.
3. Ibid, pp. 225-226.

1683 is available in Logan's[1] researches into documents belonging to the Zamorin family. I give a summary of this account with important passages reproduced. The language in these passages is Logan's, and not a translation of the documents, except in specified parts.

The ceremony lasted for twenty-eight days, in the month of Makaram (January to February). Temporary wooden structures were put up at Tirunavayi, the material being floated down river from the Zamorin's Aliparamba Chirakkal (estates) in territory controlled by the second sthani. Two months before the commencement, a circular was sent out. This reads, in the chronicles, "Royal writing to the Akampati Janam (body-guards).

"On the 5th Makaram 858 is Mahamakha Talpuyam (time of the eight lunar asterism in the festival season) and the Lokars (chief people of each locality) are required to attend at Tirunavayi as in olden times.

"Mangat Raman and Tinayancheri are sent to collect and bring you in regular order for the Mahamakham.

"You must come to Tirunavayi on the 3rd of Makaram to fight and foil as usual. But all of you should come for the Mahamakham".[2]

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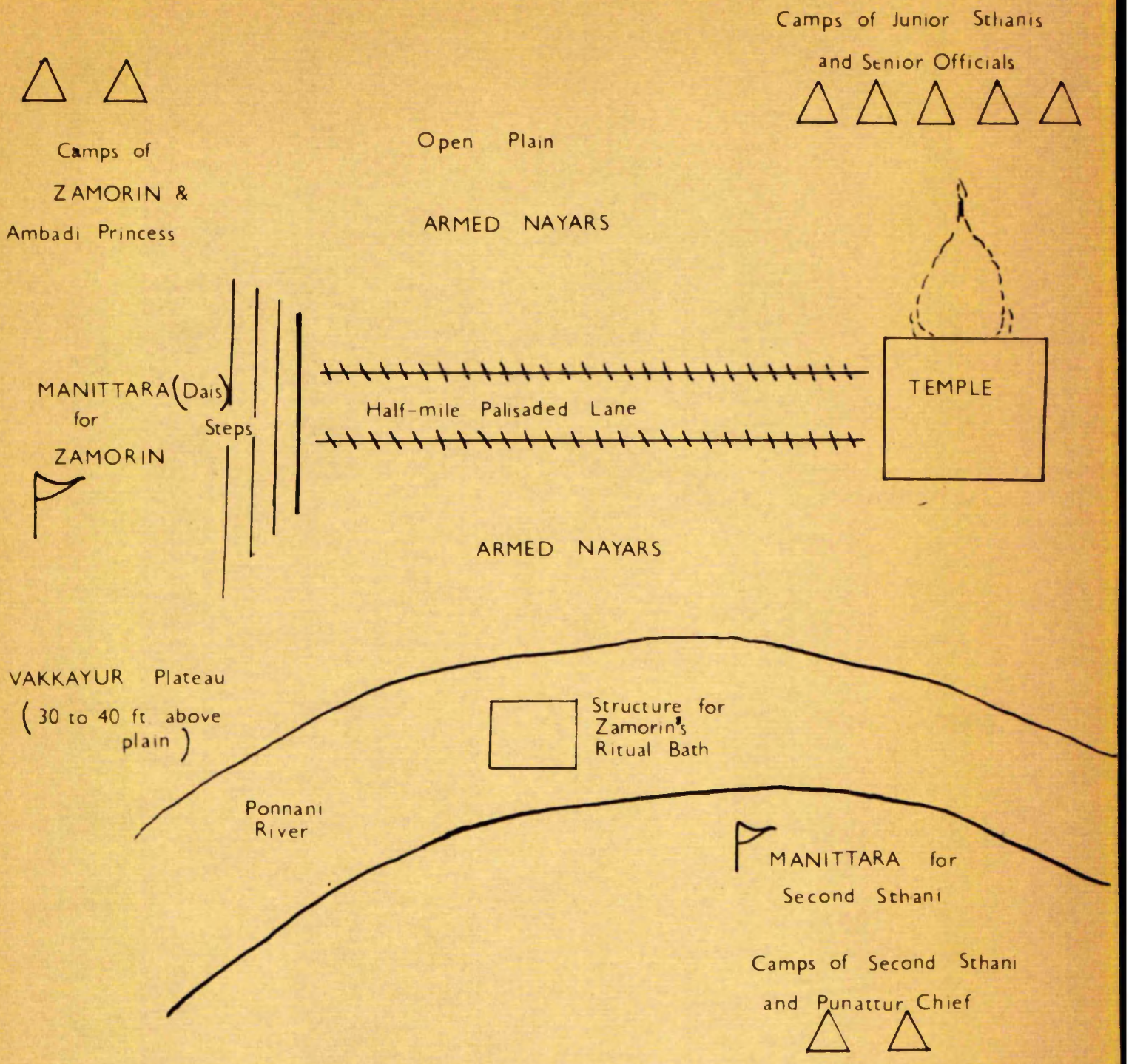
1. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, pp. 162-169.
2. Ibid, p. 165.

At Tirunavayi, the sthanis, the senior officials, and the Nayars took up allocated positions, roughly shown in the following diagram:

# the mahamakham at tirunavayi



The Zamorin made frequent appearances on the Vakkayur terrace, holding the sword of the last 'emperor',[1] Cheraman Perumal who, by tradition, had partitioned Kerala among its several chiefs in 825 A.D.; ...."but it is not alone on it that the Zamorin depends for his safety, for the plain below him is covered with the thirty thousand Nayars of Erand, the ten thousand of Polanad, and numberless petty dependent chieftains, each counting his fighting men by the hundred or the thousand, or by thousands."[2] At the stage when an elephant is formally "caparisoned with a chain of solid gold", a number of Nayars, chavers or martyrs, from four leading Nayar tarwads of Valluvanad "step forth from the crowd and receive the last blessings and farewells of their friends and relatives. They have just partaken of the last meal they are to eat on earth at the house of the temple representative of their chieftain.... On this particular occasion it is one of the house of Putumanna Panikkar[3] who heads the fray. He is joined by seventeen of his friends - Nayars or Mappilla or other arms - bearing caste men... But... notwithstanding their delight and skill and dexterity in

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1. Ibid.,p.166.
2. Ibid.,p.166.
3. The other three were Chandratthil, Kolkat, and Verkot Panikkars.

their weapons, the result is inevitable, and is prosaically recorded in the chronicle thus: "The number of Chavers who came and died early morning the next day after the elephant began to be adorned with gold trappings - being Putumanna Kantur Menon and followers - were 18".[1]

During the last ten days, every appearance of the Zamorin at his dais was the occasion for Valluvanad chavers to make their attempt on his life. The Zamorin was carefully guarded, and the guards, for the first seven days, were, in turn, the thirty thousand Ernad Nayars, Elaya Vakkayil Vellodi, the fifth, fourth, third, and second sthanis, and the ten thousand Nayars of Poland led by Calicut Talacchanmar and Ernad Menon. On these days the Zamorin went in procession, closely guarded, to the temple and the river. On the last three days, there was no procession, and both Zamorin and second sthani made appearances on their respective daises. On the second and third of these days, the third sthani and the Bettem Raja stood on the dais, facing the Zamorin.[2] On the eleventh day, the chavers made a final assault, after which the second sthani and the Tirumanasseri chief were carried to the temple end of the palisaded lane. They walked towards the Zamorin, prostrating themselves four times en route, and finally took their places on his right hand.

"After this, so the chronicle runs, it was the duty

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1. Ibid, pp. 166-167.
2. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, pp. 114-115.

of the men who had formed the body-guard to march up with music and pomp to make obeisance. On this occasion however, a large portion of the body-guard seems to have been displeased, for they left without fulfilling their duty.....

"The Ernad Menon and the Calicut Talachanna Nayar with their followers were the only chiefs who made obeisance in due form to the Zamorin on this occasion, and possibly by the time of the next festival (1695 A.D.) of which Hamilton wrote, the dissatisfaction may have increased among his followers, and the Zamorin's life even may have been endangered, as Hamilton alleges, probably through lack of men to guard him. Tradition asserts that the Chaver who managed on one occasion to get through the guards and up to the Zamorin's seat belonged to the family of the Chandrattil Panikkar.

"The chronicle winds up with a list of the Chavers slain on this occasion, viz:-

When the Zamorin was taking his stand on the terrace apparently at the commencement of the festivities .....5

On the day the elephant was adorned, as already related ..18

"The next day of Chandrattil Panikkar and followers, the number who came and died ....11

"Of Verkot Panikkar and followers, the number that came and died the third day ....12

"The number who came up to Vakkayur and died in the four days .....4

"The number of Chavers who were arrested at the place where Kalattil Itti Karunakara Menon was, and brought tied to Vakkayur and put to death .....1

"The number of Chavers arrested on the day of the sacrifice, when all the persons together made the obeisance below Vakkayur at the time when the Zamorin was taking his stand, and left tied to the bars, and who were afterwards brought to Vakkayur and after the ceremony was over and the Zamorin had returned to the palace were put to the sword .....4

Total 55"[1]

Chavers also appeared, and died, at the pre-mahamakham ceremony of Taipuyam, celebrated in 1656, 1670, and 1730.[2]

Several points stand out. As in the ariyittuvalcha, the branches of the family are not recognised in the mahamakham. They have no ritual roles per se, and there is no mention of residential arrangements for them at Tirunavayi. Kinship, at the basis of the system of sthanams, is not formally relevant to it. The sthanams, however, are all-important. Each has his or her own camp, and the male sthanis perform guard duties during the last climactic period. The second sthani in particular is marked off from the other

1. Ibid, p. 168.
2. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 118, based on Calicut Granthavari ("chronicle").

junior sthanis, both in the location of his camp across the river and in his participation in the ceremonies. His camp was a smaller replica of the Zamorin's. As in the ariyittuvalcha, the second sthani is treated as a kind of minor Zamorin. This makes for the separation of the Zamorin from the immediate heir in ritual; by recognition of the latter's importance, within the traditional forms of expressing importance, the possibility of his being a danger to the Zamorin was minimised. At the same time, the importance of this sthanam made the succession to Zamorin a smooth transition. We have no instances of regicide among Zamorins,[1] or, indeed, in other chiefdoms. And succession disputes, common enough in Cochin and elsewhere, are not known to have occurred, though this may be because they were confined to the family since no outside chiefs were powerful enough to interfere and make capital out of them.

The mahamakham was also attended by the armies of the Zamorin and of his feudatories and dependents. They were present fully armed, showed off their military skill in contests, and provided a guard for the Zamorin.

The hereditary officials, the Mangat Achan, Tinayancheri Elayatu, Dharmoth Panikkar, and Ernad Menon were present, with separate camps for each. Other officials, commanding bodies of Nayars, or administering the cities, were also present.

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1. Dalboquerque (Vol. IV., Chapter XV) claimed a Zamorin was poisoned at his instance in 1513. This is very doubtful.

Because at the 1683 mahamakham, only the Zamorin's own army - the Ernad and Polanad Nayars - made obeisance to him, we know nothing about the range of dependent chiefs who were expected to do this as well. That these chiefs had a large measure of independence is apparent from their right to withhold obeisance. The chronicle does not say what steps the Zamorin took later. But during the ceremony no ritual sanctions operated to compel obeisance.

The purely local character of the mahamakham (that is, local to the Zamorin's jurisdiction), has at times been overlooked. One view is that the "Rakshapurushan or protector of the festival was the acknowledged suzerain of Malabar...",[1] and that the mahamakham symbolised central authority. Or, the assemblage is considered to be a vast kuttam where justice was dispensed by the Zamorin,[2] or "for the discussion of affairs of national concern".[3] Logan, who had a closer knowledge of Kerala customs than the Jesuits, refers to major local festivals, held annually at Taliparamba in Kolattunad, in Kurumbranad, Palghat town, Guruvayur (near Ponnani), and in Valluvanad.[4] The mahamakham however, he did not include with these. After stating that the festival must traditionally be celebrated by the chief of the

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1. Innes, 1908, p. 459.
2. Ferroli, 1939, Vol. I, quotes from Nicholas Pimenta of the Society of Jesus, writing in 1601-1602.
3. K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1924, Vol. I, p. 251.
4. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, p. 162.

locality where it occurred, Logan claims a much wider function for the festival as celebrated by the Zamorins. Upto 1743, and the last mahamakham, the Zamorins presided "as Suzerains of Keralam, including Travancore", and all those who acknowledged their suzerainty sent flags of fealty.[1] The presence of other chiefs, or of their flags, is not necessarily a sign of subordination. At the ariyittuvalcha installation of the Zamorins invitees included almost all the major chiefs of Kerala, except the few with whom the Zamorins were engaged in a long and continuing conflict. The assumption that the Zamorins were overlords of Kerala is an untenable one. The size and grandeur of the mahamakham symbolised the power of the Zamorins, and the considerable edge they had over rival chiefs. It was not a symbol of central authority, or even of a claim to be the central authority.

Dismissing Hamilton's[2] interpretation of the mahamakham as a ritual of deposition by suicide of the Zamorins, and Duncan's[3] view that it marked the end of the twelve-yearly term of the Zamorins, and an occasion for renewals of land grants, Logan accepts only the latter part of Duncan's views.

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1. Ibid, p. 164.
2. Hamilton, (1737) 1930 ed., pp. 171-172, discussed later.
3. J. Duncan in Transactions of the Bombay Library Society, Vol. I, early nineteenth century.

He says that at the festival "all feudal ties were broken, and the parties assembled in public conclave at Tirunavayi, readjusted at such times all existing relations among themselves".[1] The twelve-yearly renewal of kanam grants[2] supports Logan's views, but the "feudal ties" were less contractual than he implies. The renewal of kanam grants was a formality. The renewal of the feudal ties (administrative offices? minor chiefly titles? land grants?) could not have been more than this.

The mahamakham was clearly a local ritual festival celebrated in Tirunavayi temple. Its performance was the duty and the privilege of the chief, who had a koyma right over the temple. The struggle for the koyma right in Tirunavayi was confined to the original claimant, the Valluvanad chief, and the Zamorin who had taken it by conquering the territory around the temple. Wars over ritual privileges, including koyma rights over temples, as we saw earlier, were a common feature in pre-British Kerala. Tirunavayi became the object of a military struggle in the same way.

The function of the chavers of Valluvanad at the mahamakham was to register a formal protest against the

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1. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, p. 164.
2. See Chapter II for land tenures.

usurpation by the Zamorins of a privilege formerly enjoyed by Valluvanad chiefs. The military struggle ended when the Zamorins became so powerful that Valluvanad was no longer an effective rival. But chavers, who were normally used during or as a consequence of wars, continued to be used by Valluvanad at the mahamakham. As expected of chavers, they were prepared to die avenging their chief. Unlike a war, however, at the mahamakham they were certain to die, and they were equally certain not to succeed in killing the presiding Zamorin. It was therefore only a formal, if bloody, protest. Hamilton's account[1] that the Zamorin was nearly killed at the 1695 mahamakham is based purely on hearsay. The chavers, drawn from leading Nayar families, had no choice in appearing at the mahamakham. Their families were granted estates on this account, and if the chavers avoided their duties they were outcasted by their own group, and had to leave the chiefdom. Logan quotes the Ilaya (second, or junior) raja of Valluvanad as saying that he had lost much of his original rajyam, or chiefdom, because of defecting chavers.[2]

On the part of the Zamorins, they countenanced the presence of the chavers insofar as they continued to

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1. Hamilton, (1737) 1930, ed., pp. 171-172.
2. Logan, 1887, Vol. II, p. CLXXIV.

allow a representative of Valluvanad to be one of the four managing trustees of Tirunavayi. "The former Raja (Valluvanad), however, had until quite lately a voice in the management of the temple, and was represented by one of the four Brahman karalars; but now (i.e. 1908) all rights are vested in the Zamorin...."[1] It was in the house of this karalar that the chavers ate their "last meal... on earth". Presumably, the Zamorin could have got rid of this karalar as a step (not necessarily effective) in putting an end to the chaver incursions at the mahamakham.

The form that political interaction between equivalent and proximate chiefdoms took, as we have seen, was mainly war. Valluvanad and Ernad had been equivalent chiefdoms. Both were large inland chiefdoms, with Samanthan chiefs. Both were engaged in constant warfare in the pre-Portuguese period, until the Zamorin out-grew Ernad and increased his territories seawards and to the south, while Valluvanad's territory shrank. The equivalence of formal caste status was not now paralleled by political equivalence, as expressed in the capacity to war against each other. The resulting danger to caste equivalence was minimised by a show (a ritual?) of war, wherein chavers, normally appanages of war, were sent to die at the mahamakham. The Valluvanad chavers, by their

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1. Innes, 1908, p. 458.

action, reiterated the equality of caste status of the Valluvanad chiefs with the Zamorins.

Note: The mahamakham ceremony, especially its chaver episodes, has fascinated early writers, nearly all of whom misunderstood it. Hamilton,[1] writing of the 1695 celebration, thought that formerly Zamorins ended twelve-year reigns by cutting their own throats at the mahamakham. Frazer,[2] using Portuguese writers, Hamilton, and Logan as his sources, describes the ceremony in a section called "Kings killed at the End of a Fixed Term". He does not commit himself, however, to the position that succession among the Zamorins was by institutionalised regicide. The most he says is that "the king of Calicut staked his crown and his life on the issue of battle" at the Mahamakham, which he translates as the Great Sacrifice.[3] Our evidence is that the only blood spilt at the mahamakham for the historical period was that of the chavers.

## The government of the chiefdoms

The chiefdoms, as we have seen in Chapter II, were unequal in terms of both the power and the ritual status of the ruling families. They tended to form into a loose cluster,

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1. Hamilton, (1737) 1930 ed., pp. 171-172.
2. Frazer, Part III of "The Golden Bough", 1911, pp. 46-58.
3. Ibid, p. 49.

with one dominant chiefdom at the core, the rest linked to it by ties of subservience which varied from a nominal submission with de facto independence, to a more complete subjection. Some of the forms that this subjection could take were[1] the payment to the dominant chiefdom of a succession fee when a dead chief was succeeded by his heir, and accession only after a royal writ was issued; annual payment of a protection fee (in Cochin), and of a tribute, and gifts at the yearly ceremonies; attendance at the succession rituals of the chief of the dominant chiefdom, and at the mahamakham (of the Zamorins); adoptions to be made only with such chief's consent; contribution of armed Nayars, which formed the basis of the power of a dominant chiefdom, vis-a-vis other clusters.

An excellent example of the relations of a subject chiefdom to its "overlord" is available in a temple chronicle account of the action taken by Cochin against Tekkemkur, for the latter's misconduct. "At half past nine on the night of the 18th of Vrischigam[2] of the Puthuvaypu year 188 (704 M.E.)[3] Thekkenkoor killed Devaswam Perum Parayan.[4] That day, the Sanketham[5] was dissolved. Know that when

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1. Miller, 1950. The following account of government in the chiefdoms draws heavily on Miller.
2. The eighth month, November, in the sign of Scorpio. Gundert, 1872.
3. That is, 1529 A.D.
4. Untouchable attached to devaswam.
5. The temple estate. See Chapter II.

twelve months had passed, Thekkenkoor had to forfeit his koyma[1] sthanam. For this and his other encroachments within the Sanketham, it was decided by the arbitrators nominated by Perumpadapil Swaroopam,[2] Porkala Mattathu Vasudevan,[3] Pariyalil Narayanan Kumaran[4] and the other arbitrators who had assembled for the purpose, that a statue of the Pariah must be made, that paddy fields and lands must be given for the expenses of the Parayans during their fasting, that an offering of a silver pot must be made and that the Perumpadapil Svaroopam as the suzerain of Thekkenkoor must, by way of penalty for the outrageous acts of the latter, present to the pagoda an elephant and its stick and Thotty,[5] and that the Sanketham may then be renewed".[6]

The account is interesting for the light it throws on the relations of chiefs with the temples and of chiefs with each other. We have seen earlier that chiefs had certain rights of supervision and management over temple estates, and that two or three chiefs might share such rights in one temple. In the above mentioned temple probably Elankunnapuzha itself - Tekkemkur had a koyma right, and Cochin who appointed the arbitrators, presumably had the melkoyma[7] right. The

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1. Right of supervision. See Chapter II.
2. Ruling family of Cochin.
3. Personal name.
4. " "
5. Elephant stick.
6. Chronicles of Elankunnappuzha temple, quoted by K.P. Padmanabha Menon, 1933, Vol. III, pp. 517-518.
7. See Chapter II.

document specifically states that Cochin is suzerain to Tekkemkur. As such, the Cochin ruler was responsible for the absolution of his feudatory for misconduct in the temple jurisdiction. He was directly responsible to the temple authorities probably the yogam - though the document, as quoted in Padmanabha Menon, does not state this. The temples therefore recognised the relations of ordination that existed among chiefs who were involved in the temple management.

The subjection of lesser chiefs stopped short of an established authoritarian relationship. In the temple dispute, Cochin was not asked to punish Tekkemkur, but rather to intercede for the latter's absolution. The exaction of tributes, fees, and armed men was primarily sanctioned by the military power of the leading chief, and only secondarily by his ritual status or his traditional position. There was no machinery of government in the way of processes of law or administrative organisation by which he could levy tributes and men from lesser chiefdoms. In the case of a conflict between a dominant chiefdom and one of its dependents, the final arbiter was the greater might of the former. Such might included both his own military resources, and those he could call upon from other related or friendly or closely subjected chiefdoms.

The relations betweem equivalent chiefdoms were segmentary. The relations between unequal chiefdoms had

authoritative content, but were not crystallised into an administrative order. They continued to be theoretically and potentially segmentary.

Within a chiefdom, however, patterns of authority were sufficiently established to permit us to talk of administrative interaction, or of ordered government. We shall see that here, again, the typical form of administration, a bureaucracy, did not develop. Instead, the existing social groups (castes) which at one axis, the horizontal, made for a fragmented political system, at the other, vertical or hierarchical axis, made for a system of ordered, authoritative relations. The hierarchical axis is essential to the existence of relationships of authority, or ordination.[1] These hierarchical relations, of significance in a political context, were not separated from vertical relations in other contexts such as ritual purity, or economic activity. In other words, there was a development of authoritative relationships as distinct from segmentary ones, but there was no separation of these into distinct institutions. There was a specialisation of function without a concomitant specialisation of structure.

The administrative functions were performed by persons of relevant caste status, who held a good economic

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1. M.G. Smith, 1960.

position and, related to this, an administrative-cum-political office. The smallest administrative unit was the desam, or village. Normally, in a desam, one family of high caste owned most of the land on janmam tenure. This jammi family owned the title, and performed the functions, of desavazhi or village headmen. They were usually Nayars of high status, (Kiriyattil subcaste in Zamorin areas, Vellayma in Cochin),[1] though some desams had Nambudiri, Ambalavasi, or Samanthan desavazhis.[2] A desavazhi was expected to supervise village ceremonies, marriages, temple administration and ritual, and law and order in the desam, and to supply and lead a body of armed men when required by a chief. He also had the duty of managing the devaswam of the village temple. Actual administration of the temple was in the hands of hereditary administrators, or uralans, who were usually heads of four prominent local Nayar tarawads. The trusteeship right, or urayma, of an extinct tarawad could be added by a desavazhi to his janmam rights.

The desavazhi was responsible for local law and order to a chief, and was in some ways controlled by him. The transfer by sale or otherwise of a desam required a chief's approval. The desavazhi performed very limited judicial functions, usually for lower castes. Higher castes settled

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1. Gough, 1950.
2. Miller, 1950.

disputes in their own assemblies in which the desavazhi, as representative of a chief, seems to have had no particular power. Criminal offences entailing sentences of death were judged by chiefs, and not by caste assemblies nor by desavazhis.

Desams were grouped together to form nads, under naduvazhis. A naduvazhi, who was more chief than headmen, was also desavazhi of at least one desam. The naduvazhi therefore was the core desavazhi of a cluster of desams. Apart from the larger size of the nads, the difference between the clusters of desams and the clusters of chiefdoms (nads) lies in the more distinctly authoritative interaction in the former, compared to the latter. The desavazhi formally recognised the authority of the naduvazhi. This was, however, not necessarily supported by any real control of the desavazhis by the naduvazhi. That would depend on how powerful the naduvazhi was.

Naduvazhis were of unequal position both in strength and caste status. They ranged from small Nayar chiefs, commanding bodies of about one hundred men (e.g. Cochin's seventy-two Madampis)[1] and always dependent on some chief, to the svarupams, of independent status, often at the centre of a cluster. If they were not a core chiefdom, they were either isolated and independent, (like Valluvanad)

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1. Miller, 1950. Alexander, 1946, thinks madampis are the same as desavazhis (p. 144).

or they were involved in a cluster in a relation of formal dependence but actual alliance, and occasional hostility. The breakdown of such alliances was frequent. The formal dependence of such a svarupam was usually expressed in the denial to it of a right to coin money, or to tile palace roofs, or to enter a war on its own. This latter stricture was not very effective since every svarupam maintained its own body of armed men, made up from its desam levies, and subject to its control via its desavazhis and not to the "overlord".

The more powerful svarupams were able to incorporate neighbouring nads under their jurisdiction by conquest, presumably reducing the conquered naduvazhi to headship of his own desam. Occasionally a svarupam became more powerful by acquiring the rights of other naduvazhis either by arranging adoptions with them, or through their extinction. The government under a svarupam was much more complex than under a naduvazhi. There was a greater division of powers and functions among senior males of the svarupam in the form of the sthanams, than in the nad or desam where the head of the respective taravad which held hereditary right to office alone held that office. The svarupams recognised upto six sthanams (as among Zamorins). Some also recognised one or two female sthanams. The female sthani had a formal status, and probably also domestic functions as eldest female of the

joint svarupam. But she had no political or administrative functions in the chiefdom. Kolattunad, the Zamorin, and Travancore had female sthanams.

In addition to these, they also had special offices entailing administrative functions which were held in hereditary right by certain families. There were hereditary ministers in Valluvanad, Ernad (Zamorin), Cochin, and probably Kolattunad, The Zamorins had a hereditary secretary, record-keeper, various court officials, mayors for some of the larger towns like Calicut, and Aliparampa,[1] and army commanders. Administrative functions were separated from political interaction by the delegation of these to a body of officials, leaving the svarupams free to concentrate on their relations to other svarupams or even naduvazhis. But the assignation of these offices along the grain of caste status, and the confirmation of this by making the offices hereditary, ensured that governmental specialisation neither disrupted the existing pattern of social relations, nor provided an alternate status system. The rulers could not escape the limitations set on their power by a stratification into castes. Their officials were embedded in these castes and were not, and could not be, perfect instruments of their policies. The ruler could not arrogate more power to himself than was

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1. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 325.

consistent with the existing social system with its typical distribution of powers. He could not centralise. Among the Zamorins, the only officials at the direct command of the svarupam and liable to dismissal were the stewards and agents who managed the private estates of the svarupam, customs collectors, collectors of fines and other dues, and judges. These were assisted by four assessors, always selected by them and not by the Zamorin.[1]

The svarupams interfered little in the naduvazhis' administration. They could intervene if there was a miscarriage of justice by the naduvazhi. Sentence of death could only be passed by them. There was however no regular process by which they functioned as the highest authority in their territories. Physical proximity, which made the sanction of force more real, would make neighbouring nads more closely subject.

There is a close relation between the lack of an organised administrative machinery and the method of collecting revenues followed by the chiefs. Except in Travancore, which was at various times ruled by invaders from the east coast, land taxes were unknown in Kerala upto the eighteenth century. Some sporadic collections were

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1. Buchanan, 1807, Vol. II, p. 394.

made in the early decades of the century by the Kolattunad chiefs, to finance defences against the Canarese invasion. Regular taxation however was for the first time imposed in 1784-5 by Tippu Sultan, the invader from Mysore, and this was continued by the English when they took over in 1792. The English abolished the customary dues such as succession fees, gifts, et cetera, of the chiefs, as also the supplying of Nayar soldiers. An English view[1] based on information supplied by Moplahs to an English Joint Commissioner of the 1790s, is: "This view (i.e. of the Moplahs) was in every sense most natural; the ancient government of divided authorities had been superseded by the organised rule first of the Mysoreans, and afterwards of the Honourable Company, and what else could be expected than that the ancient government share of the produce should go <u>along with the authority</u>?" (Logan's italics)

Romanticising prior to this piece of rationalisation, the same author describes Kerala's political system before settlement. "The Nayars who paid 'no revenue to anyone' were simply fragments of a government which had at one time levied this pattam[2] throughout the province. The subdivision and re-subdivision of the authority of government were perfectly marvellous and probably unparalleled in the

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1. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, p. 510.
2. Per Logan, derived from pad=authority, and varam=share.

history of any country in the world. The great families - the Zamorin, Kolattunad, Walluvanad, Palghat, Kottayam, Kadattanad, Kurumbranad, etc. - were petty suzerains, each with numbers of vassals, more or less independent, and more or less fluctuating in numbers. The subdivisions of authority did not cease till the lowest stratum of agricultural society was reached.

"The society thus constituted was on a thoroughly sound basis for the strongest men had opportunities of coming to the front (so to speak). The great bulk of the payers of the pattam were themselves Nayars.... These Nayars naturally attached themselves to the strongest individuals of their community, taking with them of course the pattam or authority's share of the produce, which formed a substantial object of ambition to the pushing men of the community.

"In this way numberless petty chieftains arose, and the great families waxed or waned as they were able to attract to their following larger or fewer numbers of these petty chieftains. 'No revenue' was in one sense levied from the petty chiefs who thus flocked round the standards of the great families, for the petty chiefs themselves enjoyed the ancient land revenue assessment".[1]

This statement of the nature of a polity is both amateurish and subjective. It underlines, however, the

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1. Logan, 1887, Vol. I, pp. 509-510.

relationship of administration to centralisation. A fragmented political system (and Logan does see it as one system, not a collection of small systems) goes with the absence of organised government since the "fragments" individually collect and enjoy revenue from land, and are not required to give regularly out of this to any central power.

The armies of the chiefdoms, like the administration, were not separate institutions. Warring, like administration, was a specialised function performed by certain specialised groups. But these groups were not confined to warring. They had other roles in both ritual and economic spheres of activity, to which their warrior role was linked. Warriors were almost always Nayars by caste. Some use was made by the Zamorins of Moplah soldiers, but mainly they used Moplahs for their navy - where the Nayars would not venture. Conventional land wars, then, were fought with armies of Nayar soldiers. These Nayars were hereditary warriors. They were paid small sums of money, and some rice, when on active duty. Otherwise, they lived off the proceeds from their customary kanam tenures.[1] Some Nayars might be maintained as a standing army, like the Zamorin's Lokar - a body of ten thousand men. We do not know how they were paid. There was

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1. See Chapter II.

no custom, however, of paying men or officers with grants of land which could only be transmitted by descent, barring failure of heirs.

The Nayars in a desam gathered under the leadership of their desavazhi. A chief's army was at any time made up of such desam-based units. How the desavazhis made sure of their levies, we do not know. As the leading jenmis in their desams they were in a position to exert political and economic pressure on less powerful Nayar taravads, just as they were themselves subject to pressure - more political and military than economic - from the naduvazhis. The traditions of warriorcraft among Nayars however were very strong, and there is no record of difficulties in recruitment of soldiers.

The Nayar levies could not be freely manipulated by chiefs for a number of reasons. As we have seen, warriors were born and not made. The chiefs had to accept Nayars as their only soldiers. They expanded their armies by bringing in desavazhis with their small bands of Nayars. But they exercised little direct control over the Nayars. The Nayars were linked to their desavazhis by several ties, as tenants to owners, as ritual inferiors, possibly as hypergamous affines, as long-standing neighbours, and as long-standing soldiers. The chief could make use of the Nayars only through the desavazhis. Payments, made in both cash and kind, were

limited, being made only on active duty. Spoliation of the enemy was not an accepted mode of rewarding soldiers on active duty. The Nayars had their own caste assemblies, and were not subject to internal interference either in peace or in war. The nad kuttam, or nad assembly, seems to have had the power to protest if a chief did not honour his obligations to the Nayars of that nad. If the protest flared into armed hostility, the Nayars, if they won, deserted their allegiance.[1]

Nayars did not only fight in units for a powerful chief. The units themselves might be in conflict with other like units. Where a region was dominated by a powerful chief, such feuds were less likely to develop. The weaker the chief, the greater the possibility that disputes would be resolved by feuds. North Kerala, with a weak ruling family in Kolattunad, had more powerful desavazhis than central Kerala. They were known as yajamanans.[2] They frequently quarrelled over reclamation of waste lands, and such quarrels easily developed into family feuds - Nayar tenants might join the feud.

The armies of hereditary warriors, grouped into territorial units which reflected the fragmented political system of Kerala, were an important element in what has been described earlier as contained warfare. Contained warfare

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1. Miller, 1950.
2. Ibid.

serves the purpose of the adjudication of conflicting interests of competing groups - here, chiefdoms. It is necessarily not disruptive of a political system, though it may cause changes in detail of the boundaries or alliances of specific chiefdoms. One can go further and say it was an integrative element in the society. It held together otherwise discrete territorial units in a relation of intensive and continuous interaction, including armed hostility with some, and military co-operation with others. We have here a society that was territorially segmented. The segments were, on the one hand, politically evenly balanced. On the other hand they were closely knit by caste and kinship ties, by a non-territorially segmented, ritually and economically powerful caste of Brahmins, by a common and always competing interest in the traditional reserves of wealth, the devaswams and sankethams, and in the more modern sources of wealth in the overseas spice trade. The causes for conflict between political segments were ever present. There was no machinery of government to resolve conflict. Wars were inevitable. Because the segments were closely related by caste and kinship, by an all-Kerala Brahmin caste, and by a common value-system (a common language, a shared legendary history, certain forms of worship and specifically regional temples being the more tangible aspects of such a value-system) wars were fought to rule. A chief who fought without regard to the traditionally defined limits - there were no manuals of war, comparable to

the texts expounding on appropriate behaviour for Brahmins - threatened the existing balance of segments, and of their caste and kinship orientations.

The legitimacy of war in Kerala, if not its rules, is supported by the story of the Keralolpatti legendary history. The country was partitioned in the ninth century by the last Perumal (east coast viceroy). This Perumal gave the Zamorin a sword and an injunction to fight and conquer, and he gave the Valluvanad chief his shield with which to defend himself.[1]

Travancore - A Phase of Political Centralisation

The Travancore cluster of chiefdoms was the least centralised of the four clusters in Kerala. Unlike the other three, no one chiefdom predominated. Four major chiefdoms were under collateral branches of the Kshatriya family, Tiruppappur svarupam, which ruled Travancore proper. They were the Cheravai family at Kayamkulam, Pokam at Peritally, the Elayadath svarupam, and Quilon. The collateral tie was maintained by frequent adoptions among them, at least some of which did not have the purpose of preventing extinction. In 1574-5, a prince and princess of the Trippappur svarupam (of Travancore proper) were adopted by the Cheravai family.[2] In 1621-2, a tripartite adoption

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1. K.V.K. Ayyar, 1938, p. 61.
2. Varma Raja, 1928, p. 4.

took place between Trippappur, Cheravai, and the Pokam family.[1] In this transaction, the chief of Trippappur who was also chief of Cheravai, was adopted as brother to the Pokam chief, along with a prince and two princesses of Attingal. Attingal was the maternal family of Trippappur, controlling independent estates but not fully a chiefdom. A subsequent agreement[2] between the Cheravai-Trippappur and Pokam "brothers" specified that the latter would not make any alliance without the approval of the former - obviously the initial motive behind the adoption.

Another tripartite adoption occurred in 1622-3,[3] this time being an adoption by Cheravai from Elayadath svarupam, while Elayadath took three Cheravai princes and three Attingal princesses.

Adoptions did not necessitate the severance of natal ties. The dual family membership of adoptees reinforced kinship bonds between the collateral families, and offset to some extent the political effects of segmentation. In the nucleated clusters north of Travancore the core chiefdoms imposed some degree of control whereby conflict within the cluster was inhibited, and enemies were sought outside it.

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1. Varma Raja, 1930, p. 114.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

In Travancore, with no true nucleus of power since the five major chiefdoms were more or less equally placed in territories and resources, and were all caste equals, the ties of adoption provided a measure of cohesion. Conflict among the chiefdoms however was not uncommon, though we know of no regular wars. This may have been due not only to kinship ties among them, but also to the threat of military incursions from the east coast.

Before the seventeenth century, these families were probably still one svarupam. They shared in the management of the Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum. The control of the temple was exercised by the senior sthanam known as Kulasekhara Perumal, succession to which went to the eldest male of the related families. The formal control of the temple was vested in the Tiruppappur svarupam, and the Kulasekhara Perumal had to be initiated to this svarupam (if he did not already belong to it) to acquire control of the temple.[1]

By the seventeenth century the sthanams had disappeared. Temple inscriptions for earlier periods[2] refer to senior and junior chiefs, and they come from any of the branches....." the system of co-partnership or the

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1. Varma Raja, 1928.
2. Reproduced in Nagam Aiya, 1906; K.K. Pillay, 1953.

practice of junior members of the royal family being associated with the ruling sovereign, since, in addition to this fact, the names of three different families to which the rulers belonged are mentioned, the position, in several instances, becomes distressingly complex".[1] The sthanams did not develop into a clear hierarchical order of princes, spanning the segments of the family both by a shared succession and by a distribution of the chiefly powers of the family.

The lack of well-defined sthanams is directly correlated to the dispersal of the segments of the family. In chapter II we saw that the institution of sthanams contributed to the political stability of a chiefdom. The more powerful and relatively centralised chiefdoms tended to have a definite order of sthanams. The territorial dispersal of the Travancore collaterals crystallised into political dispersal, and the sthanams lost all significance. This is admittedly a hypothetical view of the early history of Travancore. The authenticated case of Kolattunad, however, fully supports it. The eighteenth century partition of Kolattunad between two branches of the original svarupam was followed by the loss of function of the sthanams. The new chiefs were known by their territory or family name - as were the five southern Kshatriya chiefs. The sthanams

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1. K.K. Pillay, 1953, pp. 35-36.

shrank to mere titles, and under the British, fell into disuse.

In both cases, foreign invasions may have caused the breaking up of a chiefdom. Kolattunad split after a Canarese invasion. Travancore had split by the sixteenth century. There had been frequent invasions both before and after that period, from the east coast.

Conflict with like political units - other Kerala chiefdoms - made for internal cohesion of a chiefdom. Conflict with outside powers was unpredictable and unequal, and yet largely localised. [The Mysoreans - Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan - were excluded: they threatened not individual chiefs but the whole system, with its supporting values; they roused the combined if not always effective opposition of all the chiefs]. External conflict upset the internal balance of power in the involved chiefdoms. In Kolattunad, a rival faction made contact with the invaders (who were territorially and culturally accessible to them, in contrast to the Muslims from Mysore). This culminated in a partition of the chiefdom. A similar situation existed in Travancore, which worked out also in the same way.

The sthanams in other chiefdoms integrated the chiefdom and at the same time prevented its complete centralisation. They reflected the power of the chiefly family over its territory, but they kept such power dispersed

among the branches of the family. They made for a coherence that was short of centralisation, and set a limit to political development. The very strength of the Zamorin sthanams prevented centralisation of the chiefdom.

Travancore never developed sthanams, but later it went the furthest of all the Kerala chiefdoms in political centralisation, producing a bureaucratic state in the eighteenth century.

A brief history of Travancore in the eighteenth century traces the steps by which this state was formed.

The Sri Padmanabhaswami temple at Trivandrum, we have seen, was managed by the Tiruppappur svarupam, but was of concern to its four collaterals as well. The management, or yogam, of the temple consisted of six Potti Brahmins (of distant Canarese origin), a Nambudiri sanyasi[1] (Nambudiris are, and were, rare in Travancore), a Nayar noble, and only half a vote to the chief. Hence its name, Ettara, i.e. Eight-and-a-Half, Yogam. The Pottis held large janmams. The devaswam estates were leased to the Ettuvittil Pillamar (Eight Nayar nobles). The Yogam allowed the Pillamars to partition the devaswam estates, and this encouraged them to become rebellious.[2] The latter burnt the chief's palace

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1. K.K. Pillay, 1953, p. 152.
2. Panikkar, 1960, p. 232.

(during 1661-7) when he tried to reform the devaswam. They quarrelled with the yogam, and the temple had to be closed from 1673 to 1678, when an Attingal princess and a Cheravai prince reopened it.[1] The Pillamars then usurped the rented estates of the devaswam. The ruling family, at the turn of the century, was powerless in its own territories.

In 1718, two princes and two princesses were adopted from Kolattunad. In 1729, the son of the older princess, Martanda Varma, became by succession, chief of the Tiruppappur svarupam. Even before accession, Martanda Varma had advised his predecessor to curb the Pillamars, and to this end an army was acquired from the east coast.[2] Normally, the Pillamars would contribute levies of Nayar soldiers to the chief's army. The "foreign" army, however, was "too masterful" and Martanda Varma replaced it with mercenary recruits from the Maravars of the east coast.[3] The hiatus between armies led to further eruptions from the Pillamars, who now instigated the sons of the previous chief to claim the succession. The Travancore succession was, as in other Kerala chiefdoms, unequivocally matrilineal, and these claims

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1. Nagam Aiya, 1906, Vol. I, p. 304.
2. Claimed by Panikkar as coming from the Mogul governor of the Carnatic, by Raja as partly from Carnatic, partly from the Pandya kings of Madura.
3. Velu Pillai states that Panikkar and Nagam Aiya are wrong in claiming Maravar recruitment, and that Martanda Varma's innovation was to disband mercenaries and to recruit local men. He does not say who these mercenaries were. His implication is that the expansion of Travancore was effected by using a nationalist army. Velu Pillai, 1940, Vol. II, pp. 268-9.

failed. The claimants were killed in incidents in 1733, and soon after the Pillamars were arrested and hanged. The Pottis on the temple yogam were either banished or hanged.[1] Having removed all rival centres of power within Travancore, Martanda Varma now turned his attention to his neighbouring chiefs.

In the next two decades Martanda Varma annexed, at times with difficulty, the collateral chiefdoms of Quilon, Kayamkulam, and Elayadam, the Brahmin chiefdom of Purakkad, and the pepper-rich Samanthan chiefdoms of Vadakkumkur and Tekkumkur. The latter two were previously linked to Cochin. Cochin's feudatories Parur (Brahmin) and Alangad (Samanthan) were annexed by Martanda Varma's successor.

A few incidents in these annexations are of interest. In the case of Quilon and Elayadam, the ruling families became extinct and Martanda Varma refused to let them continue by adoptions. Quilon's ally Kayamkulam disputed this, and as a consequence was annexed. Then Kayamkulam's allies, Purakkad, Vadakkumkur and Tekkumkur were annexed. In the latter campaigns, the use of "foreign" (east coast) Brahmins by Vadakkumkur and Tekkumkur[2] in their armies was offset by

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1. Nagam Aiya, 1906, Vol. I, p. 338.
2. Ibid, p. 350.

Travancore sending out a contingent of fishermen, to fight with whom would convey pollution. The Brahmins fled. Purakkad was protected by the soldiers' fear of fighting a Brahmin chief. Purakkad was won by buying off its army leaders. After annexation the local Nayars in Purakkad, Vadakkumkur, and Tekkumkur, supported by Cochin and its nobles, revolted and were suppressed. The Kayamkulam Nayars revolted and were punished. The punishment of Nayar nobles is considered by Panikkar to be the first serious blow to the political system of Kerala.[1] Chiefs in Kerala, when faced with noble rebels, could suppress them by their superior armed strength. They could not punish them, for there were no established relations of authority between them. Martanda Varma, by punishing them, denied their independence even on a purely nominal level, and asserted a relation of super-ordination over them. This was exactly what he had done earlier to the Pillamar. His right to suppress Nayars traditionally subordinate to another chief was being questioned in Kayamkulam and further north.

With the annexation of Parur, Alangad and the Cochin territory of Karappuram, the new Travancore was completely formed. Further expansions became difficult because now

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1. Panikkar, 1960, p. 236.

it would involve conflict with the still powerful Zamorins. The Mysorean invasions, beginning in 1762, froze all political development in Kerala. But Travancore had ceased to be a chiefdom even before this. It was now a state.

The new centralised state of Travancore raises the question of why and how the chiefdom became a state. A brilliant analysis of the economics of expansion and centralisation in Travancore is made by A.R. Das Gupta.[1] He attributes it to the general growth of trade in Malabar after the fall of the Safavi dynasty of Persia. The Dutch Company as well as traders all along the Indian west coast had large interests in Persia. They now turned to Malabar, to its pepper. Martanda Varma took full advantage of this development.

Chiefs made profits out of trade by taxing it, and by encouraging the smuggling of pepper to avoid the European coastal control of the trade. But they exercised little control over it. They protected their merchants, and their friendship could make trade for an outside group such as the Dutch easier. But they could not guarantee supplies of pepper. This was also the case in Travancore, till 1741. In this year, Martanda Varma defeated the Dutch decisively

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1. Das Gupta, 1961.

at Colachel, and ended their attempt to win a monopoly of the pepper trade. This trade had been swelled by the annexation of his collateral chiefdoms, and was now being diverted overland to the east coast.

In 1743-44, Martanda Varma informed the English that he was taking over the pepper trade. ..."by the kings taking the Pepper into his own hands last year under pretence of knowing what quantity his Kingdom Produced, the Hon'ble Companys trade was absolutely ruin'd..."[1] By 1750, all private trade had been abolished. The English could only trade with Martanda Varma. The Dutch lost twice over. They lost their footing in Travancore. And their volume of trade through Cochin decreased because of Travancore's northward territorial expansion. They only succeeded in shutting Travancore off from trade by sea. Travancore therefore sold for profit overland to Coromandel. It sold to the English and Dutch only as much as was dictated by political necessity.[2]

Martanda Varma, by establishing a state monopoly first over pepper and then over other commodities of trade, acquired the means with which to maintain both an administrative bureaucracy and a regular army.

One factor (not discussed by Das Gupta) that gave

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1. Records of Fort St. George, Anjengo Consultations, (1744) 1935, dated 22 August.
2. Das Gupta, 1961.

a fillip to centralisation, was the policy of the English factory at Anjengo at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Their trade had suffered at the hands of the Pillamars, and they were as anxious as the chiefs to see their power broken. They set themselves out to support the chief against the Pillamars. They were not averse, for example, to supplying arms to the chiefs of Travancore.[1] Martanda Varma, however, planned his own political strategy, and proceeded to centralise his territories far beyond the convenience of the English. Where he got his ideas is not at all certain. He was served by a Tamil general and a Dutch artillery expert - they may have influenced him.[2] Or it could have been an accelerating process following from the initial need to reinstate the power of the ruling family. Again, it might be a case of genuine innovation,[3] without reference to precedent. The English barter of arms for pepper undoubtedly contributed to Travancore's capacity to conquer and annex.

If the "why" of Travancore centralisation is uncertain, we are on firm ground when we look for the ways in which centralisation was effected.

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1. Records of Fort St. George, Anjengo Consultations, (1747), 1935.
2. Panikkar calls the new Travancore "a Tamilian conception".
3. Das Gupta supports this view.

Earlier we saw that political interaction occurred within a framework of stated and unstated rules of conduct. Martanda Varma ignored or broke these rules. He refused to recognise the inalienable rights of chiefs and the continuity of chiefly families. He did this by refusing them the right to adopt when in danger of extinction, and taking their chiefdoms by escheat. Where there was no such excuse, he simply dispossessed a defeated chief. He punished his nobles, by arrest and hanging, instead of subduing them with a military operation. This implies some administrative machinery at his command, and a will to use it in this way. He also punished nobles in annexed territories. This punishment was an aspect of the establishment of his authority, of a fully ordinate relation instead of the unstable ordination that existed between unequal but independent chiefdoms. The breaking of the yogam was a denial of the general ritual immunity of Brahmins to the political attentions of chiefs.

The army recruited from the Maravar caste was also a break with tradition. By recruiting from a non-Malayali caste, Martanda Varma freed himself from dependence on his nobles for levies of warriors. Because his Mara[illegible] were paid regular salaries - unlike Nayar soldiers whose main livelihood was derived not from the chief but from customary rights in land - they formed a pliable, controllable,

instrument of policy. The later recruitment of Nayars did not change this situation, as they were no more exclusively the warriors of Travancore. The smaller chiefs who could deflect their loyalty had been broken. And the army was reorganised.

The territorial expansion was not confined to an extension of sphere of influence - that is, to the formation of a cluster. All rival centres of power were eradicated in the extended territories, which were brought under the direct control of Martanda Varma. This was made possible by the establishment of a bureaucratic administration. A large part of the bureaucratic development arose directly out of the attempt to monopolise the pepper trade. After the first announcement to this effect in 1743-44, officials, appointed by the Travancore chief, became important since they told both Europeans and local merchants who was to trade with whom, and they had powers to enforce their decisions.[1] Later, the English were told they could make contracts only with the government. After two years of trade losses, the English had to agree in 1749. Private trade was completely abolished. Unauthorized trade was punishable by death. Buyers were appointed. They bought up all pepper at a fixed low rate. Posts were established in Travancore to prevent unauthorised pepper export. Other goods were added to the government monopoly, such as tobacco and arecanut. They were

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1. Das Gupta, 1961.

stored by the government, and sold at government rates. The profits were enormous, though the cultivators got little of them. They were invested in a standing army of fifty-thousand men, a defence works on the northern frontier known as the Travancore Lines (indicating a saturation point in territorial expansion), roads, some palaces, and feeding-houses for Brahmins, and additions to Sri Padmanabhaswami temple. The "Travancore System", as Das Gupta calls the bureaucratic organisation, was built up by the Tamil minister-cum-general of Martanda Varma. A graded hierarchy of administrative offices, filled by appointment, was established. This covered the whole of Travancore. It was begun in 1743, and was noted by the English at Anjengo. Maintenance of law and order and the collection of taxes were its main functions.

These political innovations were accompanied by the development of appropriate rituals. Martanda Varma performed for the first time a murajapam in 1751 on the advice of Brahmins, to expiate the sins of war.[1] (Asoka, the ancient centraliser, propagated Buddhism for similar reasons). The mahamakham reflected the internal structure of the chiefdom

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1. Nagam Aiya, 1906, Vol. I, p. 361.

of the Zamorins. The murajapam emphasised the subjection of the chief to the deity Sri Padmanabhaswami, and to ritual values generally. Thus, it was a festival for Brahmins, not for other chiefs of Kerala. This appeal to ritual values, and to the least localised caste in Kerala, and the avoidance of any reference to the political system - traditional or new - is an attempt to legitimise politically upstart and disruptive techniques within the existing system of values. The appointed bureaucrats and mercenary soldiers were not in competition with the central authority, or were not meant to be. Neighbouring chiefs were there on sufferance, not because Travancore recognised an order of society where there was a multiplicity of chiefs. Neither of these categories were assigned a role at the murajapam. That was a ritual reflecting the one central authority and its relation to society.

# CHAPTER IV

## Sikh Political Organisation.

The present chapter consists of three sections. The first section is an introduction to the Punjab region, its topography, its ethnic heterogeneity, the territorial location of the political community which forms the subject matter of the rest of the chapter, and a brief history of its origin, caste, religion, economy, and systems of land tenure.

The second section describes the traditional political system of the Punjab. As defined in Chapter I, by a traditional political system is meant the typical political relationships found in the established, stable caste societies in India when they were not under outside domination, and before they were "bureaucratised" under British rule, and later by the Indian Constitution of 1947. In the Punjab, such a 'traditional' system of political relations came after a long period of imperial domination by Muslim rulers at Delhi. There is, therefore, no definite temporal connotation to the term though again, such a connotation is not entirely absent.

Antiquity is irrelevant to the way the word traditional is used in this thesis. Also, the time-span

covered is irrelevant to the analysis of the system, of the Punjab as of Kerala, though it is of interest in evaluating social change. The traditional system of Kerala existed continuously for eight centuries, perhaps more. And this system underwent significant changes internally (that is, not due to outside political domination) for six to seven decades in the eighteenth century. In the Punjab, after the ancient Hindu kings, there were no sovereign local rulers right up to the eighteenth century. The area was either overrun by invasions from the north, or was held, however uncertainly, as part of the territories of empire-building Islamic dynasties. Local chiefs in the Punjab won their independence in the 1760's, and formed a political community which is here called traditional in the same sense that the much older system of Kerala is traditional. This lasted for only three decades, till it underwent internal changes, resulting in a different, more centralised political system which lasted for nearly six decades - until annexation by the British in 1848. The disparity in the period covered for each of the two regions does not affect the general hypothesis that the typical stratification of

Hindu societies (into castes) is always accompanied by a political system characterised by dispersal of power. Changes in the direction of political centralisation are the result of economic and political factors within and outside the system. Neither the typical dispersal of power nor centralisation are affected by the length of time that the system has existed, although the ways in which power is dispersed or centralised is affected by the temporal factor.

The Sikh chiefs of the first three decades of their existence as a political community, who form the subject matter of the second section of this chapter, are directly comparable to the Kerala chiefs. We shall see later that in spite of differences in caste stratification, in degree of stability of political interactions, and of the influence upon these of the ritual status of chiefs, they can be regarded as variants of the type of political relations that are characteristic of traditional caste systems, such as in Kerala.

The latter six decades, of political centralisation, in the Punjab are described and discussed in the third section. This is again comparable to Kerala in the eighteenth century when its southern chiefdom Travancore began to centralise.

Historians might speculate whether the centralisation of Travancore, as also of the Punjab, was due to English expansion, or developing trade overseas in Kerala, or the decay of the Mughals in the Punjab, or better communications everywhere in India. This would require a detailed study of the whole sub-continent, and even then it may not be possible to do more than speculate. In the present analysis of political centralisation in the two regions, the focus is not on its "preconditions" or antecedent causes and conditions, but on the detail of how it was brought about, how it was limited by the earlier political and social forms, and how it functioned after it came into existence.

The choice of the Punjab as a unit comparable to Kerala, or indeed to any other region in India, may legitimately be questioned. The main variable here is Sikh religion. There was a sizeable percentage of Hindus, with a recognised and recognisable caste system, in Punjab, but after the Islamic invasions began, they had no political authority other than the very limited local powers delegated to them by an imperial bureaucracy, It was only in the seventeenth century that some Hindus organised themselves into a militant group which attempted

to seize power, in the sense of liberation (if one may use an evaluative term), and which succeeded in doing so nearly a century later.

This group, the Sikhs, formed the political community of the Punjab from the break-up of the Mughals to the English conquest. Here again, their territories did not quite coincide with the Punjab province of the British. The Himalayan tract, consisting of several Rajput states, formed a separate political system, very much like that of Rajasthan[1] in detail, and with what might be called the classical political structure of Hindu societies. It was relatively unaffected by invasions or immigrations that swept through the plains. The sub-Himalayan region had no distinct political configuration. Its population was more involved with the plains areas, but it did not provide a territorial base for aspiring chiefs. The eastern parts were mainly Hindu, the western were Muslim. The latter bordered the north-western region which was mainly Muslim and is now in West Pakistan. The fourth region, the Indo-Gangetic

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1. Dutra, 1958.

plain in Punjab, was the one in which the Sikh political system was based, and within which it centralised. It is this plains area where the majority of the Sikh population lived. It is here that Sikh chiefdoms, or misls, developed into independent political units within the Sikh system.

Punjab was politically much more heterogeneous than Kerala, even if we confine ourselves to its "typical" area, the central plains. The heterogeneity was both cultural and political, whereas in Kerala the heterogeneity was almost entirely cultural. ~~The~~ In Punjab, Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims were intermingled everywhere though usually one or the other of them predominated in each area. Religion was the major criterion of difference, but the differences were carried over into matters of food, clothing, customary practices and beliefs, and in the structure of the family, laws of inheritance and succession, the rôle of women, and so on. Politically, the Muslims participated in a government of fairly wide scale, with its centre in some distant place like Delhi or Kabul. Although most political interaction must necessarily have been local, Muslims could aspire to offices in local or regional administration,

and even more so up to the centre at Delhi. The Hindus in Punjab, as in other parts of north India, served in Muslim administration. When they did acquire power, they held it independently, and not as subsidiaries of a distant centre. The political orientation of each religious group in Punjab varied markedly.

The Hindus and Sikhs had close affinities with each other and both differed strongly from the Muslims - partly culturally, but more significantly in having a joint interest in opposing the Muslim ruling group. In fact the Sikhs could be regarded as a politically activated offshoot of Hindu society in Punjab, and both stood in radical political opposition to the Muslims. The Sikhs and Hindus at no time, before the very recent linguistic dispute of the last decade or so, are known to have opposed each other politically, even after the danger of external opposition was removed.

Of the three religious communities, variously involved in political interaction, or competition for power, we are concerned only with the Sikhs. There again we are only concerned with them as a political community with established territorial powers, and not with their evolution into such a community. This development will be

only briefly traced for the purpose of providing a historical perspective for the material, but not as a subject for analysis. The early history of the Sikhs also gives us a major link with the hypothesis of the present work, pertaining to caste, and justifies the choice of the Sikhs as comparable with Kerala. In other words, it gives some evidence that the Sikhs are a special case of caste stratification.

The founder of Sikhism was Guru Nanak (1469-1539 A.D.). His ideas appear to have grown out of the impact of Islam on Hinduism which had begun to manifest itself as early as the beginning of the fourteenth century in the teachings of Ramanand. The main emphasis of Nanak was on monotheism and personal purity, and a denial of the scheme of ritual values including the role of the Brahmins, and the observance of ceremonial. The ritual hierarchy, typical of Hindu societies, and contrasting sharply with the egalitarian self-image of Islamic societies, was here under attack. Nanak was himself a Khatri, a literate trading caste which ranked higher than the Jat peasant-cultivator caste, but lower than the Rajput caste who were traditionally a ruling caste. Little is known about the early Rajputs of

the Punjab. They were probably more deeply affected by the establishment of Muslim power than lower, non-ruling castes. They were converted in very large numbers to Islam. This may have been a result of a Muslim policy to break political opposition. Or it may have been a desperate Rajput effort to retain some of their old powers and privileges under the new rulers. By Nanak's time - that is, the early days of the Mughal empire - the Rajputs would appear to have lost their political identity, at least in the lowland areas.

Nanak's teachings were essentially reformist Hindu. He retained the belief in transmigration, but his reforms did not operate only at the level of metaphysics. He also elaborated a moral code for his followers thus providing a basis for community. But there appears to have been no attempt to organise a society in consonance with the belief that ritual differences in status were not important, and followers of Nanak always retained caste membership and status.

The tenth guru to preach Nanak's philosophy was Gobind Singh (1675-1708 A.D.). Nanak had flourished at a time when the early Afghan empire of the Tughlaks had decayed, around 1414 A.D., and for over a century,

weak Muslim dynasties ruled in north India. The founder of the Mughal empire, Babar, established himself in India during Nanak's lifetime. By the time of Guru Gobind Singh, the Mughal empire had passed its zenith and was already on the decline. Gobind Singh died a year after the last great Mughal, Aurangzeb.

Gobind Singh converted the followers of Nanak from a reformist Hindu sect into a political group, making a definite bid for power. Until then, there had been no established political interaction between the ruling Muslim dynasties at Delhi or their provincial governors in the Punjab, and the subject people, the Hindus. Any bid for power would essentially involve militancy. And local militancy would not have succeeded if the central, imperial government were still powerful.

The emergent political group was given a definite form by Gobind Singh. He instituted a baptismal ceremony for all followers and required them to adopt diacritical marks.[1] This at once cut off the followers from the parent community, and constituted them into a separate group. The immediate consequence was that high-caste

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1. The five "ks": kes = hair, kanga = comb, kirpan = dagger, kara = iron bangle, kachh = drawers.

Hindus who had retained ritual status even as followers of Nanak did not join, and there was large-scale conversion of the relatively low caste of Jats. Gobind Singh seems to have made no attempt to compromise with the Brahmins and Rajputs to keep their following.

The Sikhs, therefore, though anti-caste in expressed values, were in fact a caste-stratum if seen in relation to the Hindu society in which they were embedded. This raises the problem of why the Jats and not the Rajputs made the bid for political power. Both had a stake in the land, and both needed to be free of the land taxes imposed by an imperial government. And yet the traditional rulers, the Rajputs, did not use Sikhism to regain power. They remained a subject Hindu population in the east, and acquired citizenship by conversion to Islam in the west. The only answer appears to be that the ability to oppose Islamic groups required a flexibility of structure, and of organisation, which for the Rajputs would be self-defeating. If they sought to acquire power, they could only do so by loosening ritual restrictions. This meant that they weakened their existing status. As a caste, they had much to lose, though they might acquire leadership

of the Hindus. The Jats had little to lose in ritual status. They formed a numerically large stratum, and would in any case provide a large part of the armed forces, even if leadership were kept by the Rajputs. The waiving of ritual status as a qualification for political leadership provided a natural avenue for the Jats.

The Sikhs, therefore, may legitimately be considered a special case of caste. They were not a complete society in themselves, with exclusive or almost exclusive control of a territory and its economy. They are much more like a dominant[1] (and not ruling) caste, wedged into a caste system of the usual kind, with Brahmins at the top and untouchables at the bottom. There was however a vital difference between the Sikhs as a group, and castes, dominant or otherwise, as groups. The Sikh community was in fact a congregation and not a community.[2] Membership was not by heredity, but by formal

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1. In Srinivas' sense. See Chapter I.
2. Weber, 1957, pp. 302-321.

recruitment, and even when subsequent generations of Sikhs automatically took their fathers' religion, they had to undergo formal baptism, Technically therefore, membership was open to anyone who wished to associate himself with the special interests of this group. This associational quality gave to the Sikhs a flexibility and capacity to organise around a common interest impossible for the "organic" caste-communities.[1] Leaders could come up on the basis, not of birth, but of the ability to fulfil the explicit purposes of the congregation, in this case the protection of the followers against Islamic persecution.

Caste stratification, therefore, is relevant to an understanding of the Sikh society. It is relevant negatively, in so far as it places the Sikhs into a wider structural perspective, as a group interacting with other groups in their territories, and not an isolated entity. Their bid for power, which hit at the Rajput's traditional rule - at the same time as it was overtly directed against the Muslims, gave them a local political dominance. "Old Settlement Reports are full of remarks about the decadence,

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1. Weber, ibid.,p.338.

if not the virtual disappearance, of the Rajput gentry in those districts where Sikh sway was most absolute."[1] Positively, we know that the Sikhs never completely abolished caste difference within their own ranks, as we can see from the retention of traditions of caste of origin, and of related rules of marriage and inheritance. Nor did they cut loose from traditional ritual interactions with specifically Hindu castes. "Hindus and Sikhs, except Kukas, are greatly ruled by Brahmins. Every one has a parohit or priest for every-day life, and a pāda or superior priest (who must be a learned man, read in the Scriptures) for marriage and other celebrations. Whatever observances a Brahmin enjoins must be performed ....."[2] Again, "Nearly all Sikh villagers reverence and make use of the Brahmin almost as freely as do their Hindu neighbours."[3] The records of the last months of Ranjit Singh's life, (1839),[4] are full of references to gifts of money, food, clothes, jewels and livestock made to Brahmins for his recovery from illness. It is not unlikely however that the

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1. H.A.Rose, vol.1, 1919, p.12.
2. Gupta,Vol.III,1944, pp. 159]160, quoted from Ludhianana District Gazetteer.
3. Ibid.,p.160,quoted from Census Report, 1881.
4. Ganda Singh, 1952.

relationship with Brahmins varied both in space and time. In the heart of Sikh country, or the Manjha tract between the Sutlej and the Ravi - tributaries of the Indus- it is probable that Brahmins were less important to the Sikhs. This is also likely to have been the case during the period of Sikh expansion in the eighteenth century, when they were involved in militant opposition to the prevailing government. Ranjit Singh's cordiality to Brahmins was probably a function of his need to stabilise his empire which included specifically Hindu castes, and some of which provided him with almost all his administrators, and some generals. But his attitude to Brahmins was not novel for the Sikhs, who had never carried out fully that part of their teachings which denied caste difference and ritual observance.

The period during which the Sikhs developed from a militant religious sect into a political community with a more or less clear-cut territorial jurisdiction lasted from 1708 to 1763. During this period, there was a series of military invasions by Afghan rulers who came to acquire plundered wealth, and met little opposition from the decaying Mughal dynasty and its governors in the north.

The Afghans showed no political interest, and they returned with plunder, making no serious effort at political consolidation. The Sikhs became powerful enough, after an early career of guerilla warfare, to face the Afghans and finally defeat them in 1763, with the destruction of the city of Sirhind.

From 1763 to 1799, when Ranjit Singh captured Lahore, the Sikhs exercised political power in Punjab. The first shape of the emergent system is the one considered in the present thesis as characteristic of caste societies. This system forms the subject matter of the next section.

Before describing the system it will be useful to say something about the economy of the region. The correlation of economic factors to political conflict, its causes, its alignments, and the effect on stratification, is much more easily discernable in Kerala than in Punjab. Production of spices, and their export overseas, were a major factor in Kerala politics. The economic prizes were less obvious in Punjab. The Sikhs had started out with a long tradition of peasant proprietorship as Jats, and are not on record as big landowners under the Muslims. Most of their

genealogies claim an origin from Rajput clans of Rajasthan, and founding ancestors, the first immigrants, are dated roughly to the 15th or 16th centuries, so that they were probably not dispossessed landlords under the Muslims who were by then the established rulers. None of them are known to have engaged in trade, nor did any of the wealth gained by trade find its way to them before they acquired power. This may have been partly due to the fact that local wealth was almost entirely agricultural and that Punjab was only on a trade route from Delhi to Afghanistan, and that commercial activity here was part of a wider economy, linked to the Islamic empires. In Kerala, the local chiefs controlled most of the trade, and we can speak of a localised economy, from the point of view of the chiefs though not from that of the Moors or Europeans. In Punjab, local produce was mainly livestock and grain, and markets were confined to neighbouring territories such as Afghanistan in the north and Bikaner in the south. The revenues of this trade went to whichever imperial government was in power. But in Punjab, as in Kerala, the owners of land and the traders formed distinct groups. The traders were mainly the Hindu castes

of Khatris in west, Aroras in central, and Agrawals in south and east Punjab, all traders by tradition. Land was owned mainly by Rajputs and Jats, who again tended to be Muslims in the west, Sikhs in the centre, and Hindus in the east and south. The Sikhs as we saw, were mainly Jats. The struggle for power occurred among these landbased groups, particularly the Muslims and the Sikhs. The Hindus were more passive politically, and their proximity to Delhi is probably only a fractional explanation of the passivity. The politically motivated among them apparently joined the Sikh ranks. The point to note here is that the new rulers came, not from urban or wealthy groups, but from the ranks of the landowners.

In Kerala we saw that the system of land tenure was ideally suited to the political system. Ownership was vested very largely in a caste - Brahmins - and institutions - temples - that were not subject to displacement or dispossession, a constant risk in a system characterized by recurrent armed conflict. Nor were the actual cultivators, the low-caste tenants and labourers, concerned in the business of politics and war. The caste

which provided the bulk of the army, on the other hand, was supported by a kind of tenancy (the kanam tenure) which was stable, and which allowed sub-lease to cultivators. So that they were freed for war by not bearing directly the responsibility of either ownership or cultivation of the land which was still the primary source of production in Kerala.

The Sikhs, probably small peasant proprietors under the Islamic empires, had four main kinds of tenure. These were more directly linked to the political system than in Kerala. The holding of land itself conferred power, and the extent of power depended directly on the size of the holding. In Kerala, land ownership was not invariably an index of power in political relationships. On the contrary, in theory it indicated social and economic privilege derived from ritual status. Brahmins were the original owners of all the land. In fact, Kshatriya,Samanthan and Nayar chiefs held large estates, the size of which undoubtedly determined the extent of their power. But much land was held by Brahmins and by temples and was thus politically neutralised.

In Punjab, there were village tenures, such as the zamindari and pattidari,[1] and there were tenures derived

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1. Punjab Gazetteer, 1888-9, pp.137-138.

directly from political office and interaction, such as misldari, tabadari and jagirdari.[1]

In the communal tenures, all villagers shared ownership of village lands, and the lands that each cultivated were held by him as a tenant of the community. Under the British, they had a joint responsibility to pay the revenue. In 1888, the most prevalent kind of tenure was one where estates were held partly in common by a village and partly by individual owners in it. The next in extent of incidence was one where "possession is the measure of the right in all lands."[2] Less prevalent tenures were those where village lands were divided according to ancestral or customary shares, subject to the law of inheritance, villages paying revenue as a unit, the individual estates, and lessees of the British Government. The communal tenures are known as pattidari (i.e., holders of shares), and the community is called a bhyachara, or brotherhood.[3] The zamindari tenure is also communal, but zamindars are usually individual owners, and their estates are larger than the shares of the pattidars.[4] In both kinds

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1. Gupta, 1944, Vol.II, pp. 24-26.
2. Punjab Gazetteer, 1888-9, table on p. 136.
3. This is a local form of tenure not to be confused with the zamindaris conferred by the central power, Mughal or other, for loyalty or services.
4. Punjab Gazetteer, 1888-9, Table XV.

of tenure, we have a community of land owners of almost equal status.

The other tenures are not as independent as the communal tenures, and are probably not as old. They reflect political interdependencies and could only have developed after the Sikhs acquired power. They certainly were not continued by the British after 1848. The misldari tenure was land allotted to men not native to the village by leading men of the misl - a loose confederation of Sikhs, of which more later - in return for services rendered; the land was given as outright gift, and was not resumed if the recipient transferred his loyalties to another misl. The tabadari tenure was granted by leading men to their retainers, and could be resumed at will. Jagirdari was granted to relatives or dependents who were under the grantor's control, usually on condition that they supplied a quota of armed men on horses. Jagirdari lands could also be resumed at will.

There was no separation of agriculture and politics. The same men who owned the land and tilled it fought in the wars that arose first from the combination against external opposition, and later from the nature of the political system

with its several loci of power. How this affected the economic situation is not at all clear from the histories. It may be correct to assume that at least during the Sikh period of rule, agricultural activity was not allowed to suffer. "....the country is said to be in a high state of cultivation which, I believe, because they carry into it all the cattle fit for tillage, which come into their possession by plunder, collect a very moderate rent, and that mostly in kind, and during any intestine disputes, their soldiery never molest the husbandman."[1] As long as the Sikhs were paid a tribute, landowners were safe from plunder. "The cattle is their principal aim.....Their own immediate possessions are exceedingly well cultivated, populous and rich; the revenues in general taken in kind throughout and not in money, which is favourable to the tiller."[2]

Agriculture therefore was allowed to flourish, though we do not know exactly how the peasant divided his year between soldiering and cultivation. The modes of holding land did not ensure a separation of the two activities either. They did have some political significance. The communal tenures indicate an equitable distribution of resources among the

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1. Major James Browne, "The history of the Origin and Progress of the Sicks", in Ganda Singh, 1962, p.17.
2. Col.A.L.H.Polier, "An Account of the Sikhs", probably written in 1780, in Ganda Singh, 1962, p.62.

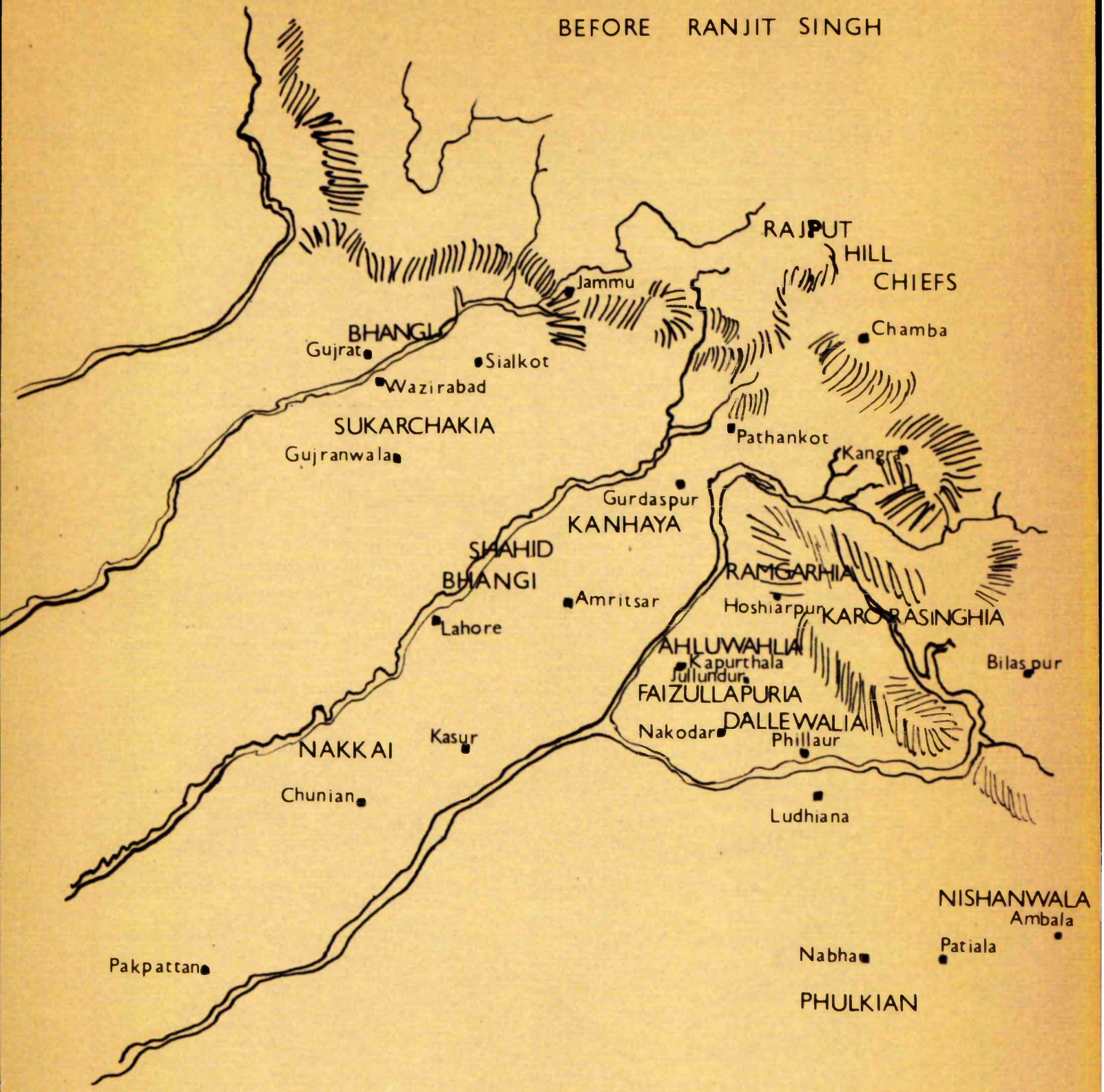
landowning groups, and the relative independence of the community from political or authoritarian involvment in the wider system of government, that is, in any formal government. The political tenures on the other hand, indicate the obtrusion of the wider system of government into the village and into agriculture.

The 'Traditional' Political System of Punjab

The historical period during which the typical traditional system, as described above, existed, began in 1763 with the fall of Sirhind, and ended in 1799 with the capture of Lahore by Ranjit Singh. We shall examine the political units that made up this system, the ties that bound them into one system over and above the political ones of conflict and coopenation, and the nature of political interaction.

Most historians of the Sikhs list twelve misls or leading families who had acquired territorial sovereignty over various tracts. The misls may be described as emergent chiefdoms, each with a chiefly family that exercised control in its territory, not by any formal conferment of power, but by virtue of its larger resources both in wealth and

# the sikh misls of punjab



armed might as against the resources of other Sikh families. The Sikh chiefs however, had no formal, recognised political statuses. And the misl consisted not always of one family but of two, or even three, whose relations with each other are not very clear. The two or three families may have a common ancestor. Again, they may only be neighbours, and so share a political interest in their territories. Marriages were not consistently used to cement intra-misl relations. In fact, they very frequently occurred between misls with rival interests.

The more important misls had a large following of clusters, or constellations, of power, in exactly the same way that the powerful chiefdoms did in Kerala. There was an informal hierarchy of power within each cluster, but this was not crystallised into a system of authority relations, with some kind of administrative control vested in the misl's leading, or central, family. In Kerala the hierarchy of power was recognised in the differential caste rank of the higher and lower chiefs. The Sikhs had no formally recognised differences, the development of which would obviously need a longer time-span than that of the Sikh period.

The three most important misls, the Sukarchakia, the Bhangi, and the Kanhaya, between them led over eighty per cent of the smaller chiefs,[1] all of whom are listed, with brief biographies, by Griffin. All three were located between the Beas and Ravi rivers (Bari Doab). The Kanhaya held most of the north-east tract, around Gurdaspur. Sukarchakia held the north-west, around Gujranwala. The Bhangis held Lahore and Amritsar, Sialkot and Gujrat. This whole area is known as the Manjha tract, and is the home of the Sikhs.

Other misls in the area were the Ramgarhia (around Amritsar) and the Nakkai (south of the Bhangis.) In the Jullundur Doab, between the Beas and Sutlej rivers, and just across the Sutlej, were the well-known misls of Nishanwala, Karorasinghia, and Dallewalia, none however very powerful, and the Ahluwahlia misl which had a special prestige as its founder was recognised by the Sikhs as a religious leader, and kept its estates even under the British.

The remaining three misls, the Phulkian, the Singhpuria, and the Shahid, were located south of the Sutlej, known as the Malwa tract, which was colonised by some Manjha Sikhs, and which made some local converts to Sikhism, but is culturally different from the Manjha. The Sikh chiefdoms

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1. Griffin and Massy, 1909.

bordered on, or included, large Hindu populations. The Hindus increased in numbers further south, and also diverged culturally in speech, dress, diet, and caste forms, which resembled (and still do) the contiguous territories of Rajasthan and western U.P.

These cis-Sutlej misls seem to have developed on different lines.. Both the Phulkian and the Singhpuria families split up into several segments, dividing up both estates, and political rights in these estates in a way that never happened in the Manjha. Partition of property at each succession was the general rule among all Sikhs. Given scope for political expansion, the Cis-Sutlej pattern of segmentation seems the natural result of the law of inheritance. The same processes seem to have worked in Rajasthan under the early Mughals, when they could expand to north and east. The cis-Sutlej misls were politically separated from the Manjha, partly through geographical isolation, and partly because of developments around Delhi, which early brought them under the control of the British. The Manjha area was completely independent till final annexation in 1848, and here we find what has been defined in the present thesis as the typical, or

traditional Punjabi system of political interaction. In the Manjha area, expansion was severely limited by the existence of still quite powerful Muslim chiefs in the west and north-west. Warfare here was not a glorified family quarrel as it was in the cis-Sutlej. And mortality in war was more frequent. This would reduce the number of heirs to an estate, and limit the fragmentation of territory and concomitant political rights. In two of the major misls in the Manjha, in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, there was only one surviving heir. War in such a situation is not merely a symptom of a system of dispersed power. It has the positive function of preserving a political unit by limiting segmentation of territory.

In Kerala, where ancestral estates were impartible, there was no immediate threat to a political unit in having several heirs. On the contrary, sanctions existed to protect heirs from death in battle. This ensured the continuity of a political unit. Among the Sikhs, dispersal of power was not ensured by the necessary continuance of several centres of power, so that no one might grow by destroying another, as was the case in Kerala. In the absence of a settled political system, with large possibilities of expansion at the expense of other units, power was

constantly building up, and then fragmenting by partition among heirs. It is not possible to go into a discussion here of the Jat laws of inheritance in Punjab as well as outside it, and their relation to a political system which allowed (and indeed had) opportunities for territorial expansion. But if we cannot elaborate a historical explanation, we can certainly postulate that the laws of inheritance had the function of keeping power dispersed. If allowed to operate to the full, however, they threatened the existence of political units by over-fragmentation. The decimation of heirs in wars offset this threat. The detail in the two regions of Kerala and Punjab therefore differs. In both we find a political system consisting of conflicting clusters of power, with built-in rules that perpetuate the existence of the units that make up these clusters. But the rules themselves vary for historical reasons, the discussion of which lies beyond the scope of the present study.

The military base of the political system was one consistent with dispersal of power, and closely resembles the feudal legies of medieval Europe. There was no

centrally organised army. All the fighting men came from one stratum, the Sikhs. This stratum, we have seen, is not quite a caste stratum. It originally recruited its members without any formal restrictions, though in fact it quickly became a largely hereditary group. The denial of caste difference, we saw earlier, did not prevent its being in many ways still a caste stratum, with nearly two thirds of its members of Jat origin. Most warriors in Punjab, therefore, acquired their profession first as members of the Sikh group, in subsequent generations by birth. As Jats, most of them claimed to be descendants of the traditional warriors of north India, the Rajputs. As Sikhs, they were only reverting to the traditional activity of distant Rajput forefathers.

Sikh warriors banded together under a chief who was himself a Sikh.[1] Their equipment was extremely simple consisting of swords and daggers, very simple firearms, blankets, utensils and ropes, a horse for fighting, and a baggage pony. The chiefs differed only in having finer horses and weapons. Part at least of the soldiers'

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1. Gupta, 1952, Vol.I, p.293.

equipment was provided by themselves. "Three fifths of the horses in the Punjab are the property of the different chieftains, the remainder belong to the peasantry who have become settlers."[1] Payments were made from plunder, and in allotments of land. The most common form of payment was agricultural produce at harvest time.[2] The bands of soldiers were not formed into regular units or regiments of a single Sikh army. There was no uniform system of either recruitment or training. "The chiefs are numerous, some of whom have the command of ten or twelve thousand cavalry; but this power is confined to a small number,[3] the inferior officers maintaining from one to two thousand, and many not more than twenty or thirty horses, a certain quota of which is furnished by the chiefs, the greater part being the individual property of the horsemen".[4] (Polier differs from Francklin on the question of who provided most of the horses. What both are saying is that warriors were not completely dependent on a chief for equipment).

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1. William Francklin, extract from 'Military Memoirs of Mr. George Thomas', 1803, in Ganda Singh, 1962, p.105.
2. Gupta, 1952, Vol.I, pp.292-293.
3. A European misconception for "chief".
4. Col.A.H.Polier and George Foster, "A Character of the Sieks", extracted from The Asiatic Annual Register for 1800, in Ganda Singh, 1962, p.67.

The Sikh warriors therefore did not form a unified organisation except, as we shall see shortly, when the several chiefs combined in the face of external opposition. Even then, there was a coalescence of chiefs, or clusters of chiefs, of unequal power but equal formal status, held together only by the external opposition and not by any regular internal organisation. The similarities to Kerala are obvious. There we had a completely hereditary stratum, or caste, of warriors. They were grouped under chiefs of unequal power, though unlike the Sikhs, Kerala chiefs had recognised differences in caste rank which coincided in a general way with their political and economic position. Warriors had simple equipment, the horse being unknown here. Swords, bows and arrows, and simple firearms were their main weapons up to the eighteenth century. Being a more settled region, there was probably less desertion from one chief to another than in Punjab, but there was no binding legal or religious tie between a chief and his warriors, and the latter could desert at will.

Unlike Kerala, wars were not fought according to established rules of strategy and social observance. Like Kerala, however, war was localised and small-scale, and it was recurrent. It was fought to keep spheres of influences

and territory rather than to expand. That no overwhelming conquests were made is evident from the fact that villages regarded as the hereditary estates of chiefs continued to be so regarded till the twentieth century, though with curtailed powers.[1] Annexation of land in absolute sovereign right was not the normal motif of political conflict in Kerala, till the rise of the Zamorins, and, later of Travancore. Nor was it so in Sikh Punjab, till the rise of Ranjit Singh.

An almost perfect concomitance can be postulated among the three factors of caste stratification, dispersal of political power, and a non-centralised army (which here coincides with a hereditary stratum of warriors). The connection of the latter two is a close one. Presumably however they may occur in societies not stratified into hereditary groups throughout.[2] But caste societies of the traditional kind (and this qualification of caste is necessary, for it is impossible to predict whether, when they change, they can still be justificably called caste societies, or should be called something else) are

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1. Griffin and Massy, 1909.
2. Andrzejewski, 1953.

necessarily accompanied by a system of dispersed political and military power.

If the political system was fragmented, what held the fragments together, apart from the fact of political interaction of this non-centralised kind? Religious association, we saw, was the original basis of the group.

Out of the religious association there developed a form of political organisation, enabling the Sikhs to function as a political whole. Such organisation however was irregular and temporary, being oriented to the solution of immediate problems. The organisation of political activity on this scale was formally linked to the major integrating factor at this level-religion. It took two main forms. One was the biennial assemblies at Baisakhi (around April) and Divali (around October) at Amritsar, at which political decisions were made by the whole group. The other was military organisation. The meetings at Amritsar, called gurumata (which properly means the "decision of the Guru"), began in Divali, 1745. The first gurumata was concerned with organising a Sikh army to be known as the Dal Khalsa.[1] Subsequent decisions related

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1. Gupta, 1952, Vol.I,p.21.

to building a fort, and chiefs' residences in Amritsar, fighting the Afghans, punishing local enemies of the Sikhs, and so on. The last gurumata was held in 1805, in connection with a Maratha appeal for help against the English.

Gurumatas were regarded as decisions of the entire congregation, though in fact a leadership structure very quickly developed. The very first gurumata, setting up twenty-five leaders with a hundred men each to form the Sikh army, probably owed its origin to the emergence of this leadership structure which was of a political, as distinct from a religious, kind. Sinha makes an interesting point about assemblies held especially to deal with policy matters at times other than Baisakhi and Divali. He notes that these were much less orderly than the annual religious gatherings.[1]

The Dal Khalsa was a collection of small armed bands, some of which grew considerably in size but no one of which imposed itself in a position of authority over the others. The chiefs did formally acknowledge one leader, Nawab Kapur[2]

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1. Sinha, 1946, pp.142-143.
2. A Muhammadan title. Sikh chiefs rarely had such titles.

Singh of Faizullapur, who then raised Jassa Singh Ahluwahlia to the command of the Dal Khalsa. But there was no established system by which the commander organised the Dal and its strategy. The Dal functioned effectively in so far as its constituent chiefs - who were not officers but independent men - found it necessary to act together against a powerful common enemy. As long as the necessity existed, the Dal continued to function even after it had grown to sixty-five chiefs in 1748. These were then regrouped into eleven jathas (the military predecessors of the territorial misls). These jathas were again grouped into a senior and a junior branch of the Dal in 1762. In spite of the absence of a central command, the Dal was militarily effective, till the final defeat of the enemy removed the necessity to combine. Then, because of the absence of a central command, the Dal at once broke up into constituent jathas. Territorial localisation of the jathas inevitably created conflicts over territorial boundaries and where opportunities for expansion still existed. The only central institution of the Sikhs, the religious organisation, had no machinery, political or judicial, for the resolution of such conflicts. Every

such dispute could only be resolved by war. Various observers of the period[1] have commented on the state of constant internecine war, not only between chiefs of misls but within the chiefly families as well. Recurrent armed conflict among political persons enjoying roughly equivalent power and status, and identifiable as sharing common cultural forms as well as participating in a distinct social system, is a symtom of a dispersal of power.

The Punjab system therefore shows very close parallels to the Kerala system, although the detail varies. The causes of conflict were never ritual in Punjab. They very often were in Kerala. The secular conflict in Kerala was over control of the pepper trade, and included attempts to win over foreign traders. In Punjab, it was almost always over land. The laws of inheritance contributed to conflict: paradoxically in Punjab, by allowing partition in each generation so that the number of contenders was always considerable and might indeed increase; in Kerala, by forbidding alienation so that the number of contenders remained constant, and could not decrease. In both cases

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1. Browne, Francklin, in Ganda Singh, 1962, and Malcolm, 1812.

political persons or families belonged to one stratum, or to two or three closely linked strata, and to no other. The warriors on whose strength of numbers and equipment the power of political persons depended also came from one stratum, lower in status than the ruling strata, and again with a monopoly over what might be legitimately called their occupation. The strata in Kerala were clearly castes. In Punjab, the stratum which held power and provided warriors was less clearly a caste. It was articulated around a specific interest- a religious creed, and its political defence - but it was an articulation confined mainly to members of one caste, and the fact that it excluded a caste of slightly higher rank, and traditionally a caste of rulers, the Rajputs, shows it to be what one might consider a type of caste association. Here, we need to make a qualification. Even if we consider it as a caste association, we cannot include it in the modern form of caste associations where such associations are concomitants of interaction between castes as such, and which Bailey[1] has described as the revolutionary change. As an associational group, the major interaction of Sikhs was with,

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1. Bailey, 1963a, 1963b.

or against, Muslim powers. Although in a sense opposed to Rajputs, Sikh political activity was never active in this respect. When not facing a Muslim opposition, the political interaction occurred within the group, between units weakly stratified in internal structure. This was the typical interaction of traditional caste societies.

Political Centralisation in Punjab.

The political centralisation of Punjab was forecast about two decades earlier by Warren Hastings[1]. In 1784, he said of the Sikhs, "A constitution so framed may subsist unchanged for a length of time, while it has no powerful neighbours to invade it and while it remains confined within the limits of its native territory. But when it aims at permanent conquest and carries the principles of its own construction into new establishments, it becomes liable to almost certain variation from whatever rules they adopt for the distribution of territory or the appropriation of revenue, because both must introduce a new species of property and add to the individual power which becomes possessed of it. In such a change of polity, should it so happen that one man of superior capacity and

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1. Selections from the State Papers of Governer General Warren Hastings. Forrest, Vol.3, quoted in Sinha, 1946, pp. 154-155.

and enterprise should aquire but a few degrees of power beyond his nearest competitors, it will be easy to trace in the primitive defects of such a government the gradual and easy means by which the whole might be enveloped within his own supremacy."

This is exactly what happened in Punjab, starting with the capture of Lahore in 1799 by Ranjit Singh of the Sukarchakia misl.

The potential for expansion beyond the "native territory" of the Sikhs lay mostly towards the western plains across the other tributaries of the Indus. The two misls which had aquired some footing in this area were the Sukarchakia and Bhangi. Both were active against border tribes of Muslims. The Bhangis held the city of Lahore which had been the capital of the Mughal province. This gave them a political prestige in addition to the power they actually enjoyed. The misl also had several leading men, in itself a source of power to the misl. Leaders of a misl do not appear normally to have quarrelled, although they were usually independentof each other. The Sukarchakia held territories further out in the hostile

areas of the north-west. They were more open to fatal attack, and Ranjit Singh's father and grandfather both died young. Ranjit Singh was an only son, as were his father, his grandfather, and also his great-grandfather. Leadership was therefore more restricted than in the case of the Bhangis.

This proved however to be an advantage in the long run, giving just those "few degrees of power beyond his nearest competitors" postulated by Warren Hastings. Ranjit Singh succeeded to a chiefdom in which for the three preceeding generations there had been only a single legal heir, and there had no partition of estates at all. By demographic accidents, the Sukarchakia misl avoided the fragmentation characteristic of all inheritance and succession among the Sikh Jats.

At the age of fifteen, Ranjit Singh married a girl of the Kanhaya misl, which was almost as powerful as the Bhangis and Sukarchakia. Her father, an only surviving son with issue, had died in war, and on her grandfather's death, the entire estate went to her mother. Widows inherited a life interest in the husband's property,

although in some families where the political stakes were high, as the Bhangis, the male collaterals took it over. Normally, a man's brother inherited his property only by marrying the deceased's widow. Several such cases, especially among Malwa Sikhs, are recorded by Griffin.[1] Ranjit Singh's mother-in-law did not marry again as there were no husbands' brothers. Her daughter, an only child, was sole heir to her grandfather's territories, and these ultimately came to Ranjit Singh, who had married her, by virtue of this marriage. Ranjit Singh therefore inherited the whole Sukarchakia territory, and all the territory of one leading Kanhaya chief. The following genealogies show up his advantage as compared to a related branch of his family, the Sindhanwalias, and to his rival misl, the Bhangis.

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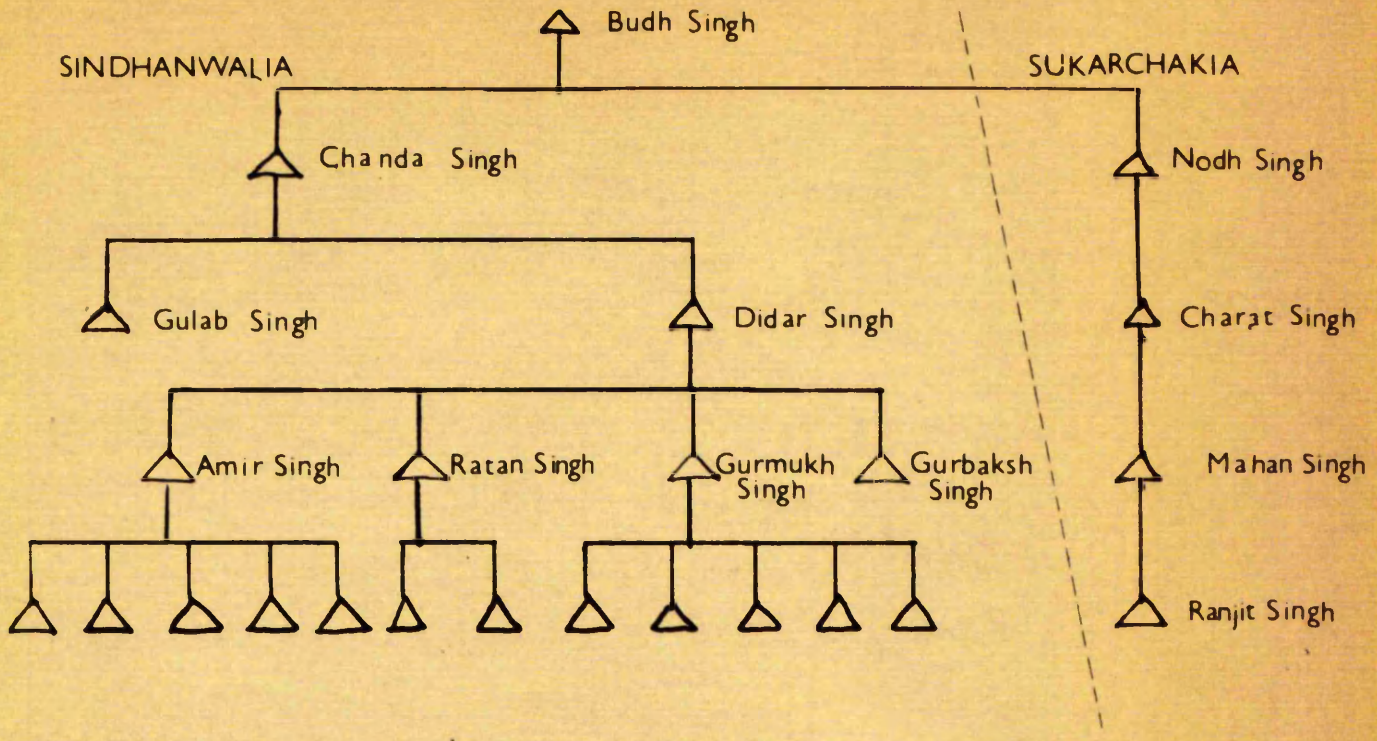
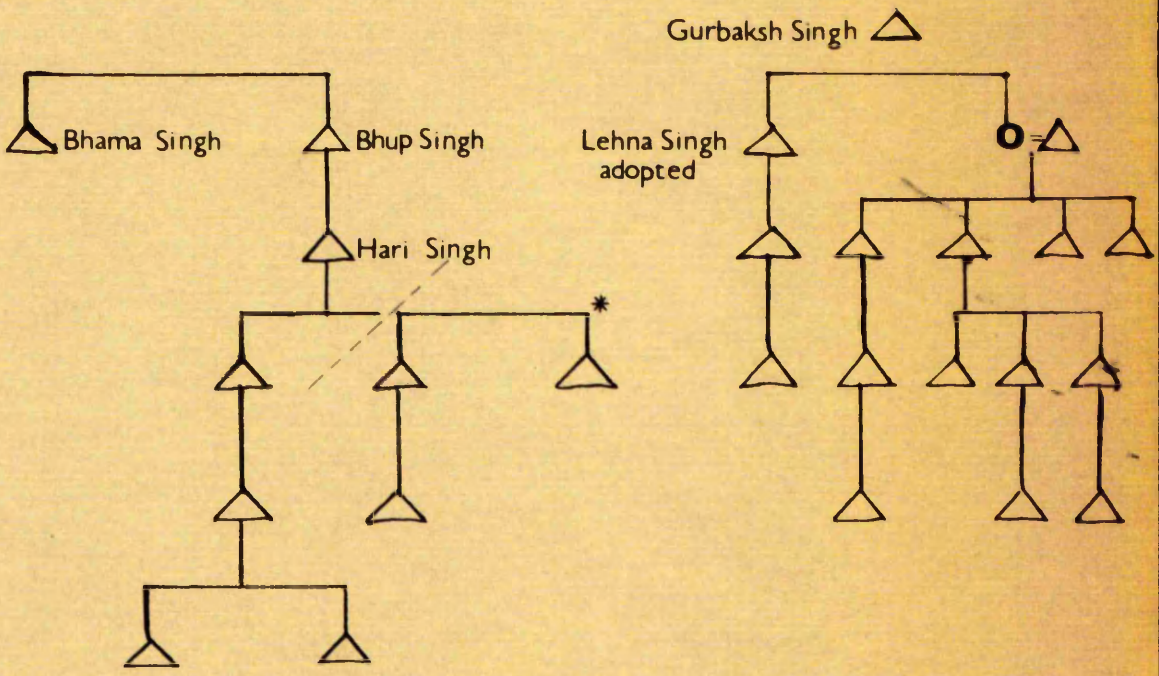
1. Griffin, 1869

## GENEALOGY OF THE SUKARCHAKIA FAMILY & ITS COLLATERALS – THE SINDHANWALIAS




## GENEALOGIES OF THE BHANGI MISL




*Not clear whether the two brothers who succeeded Hari Singh were his sons or not.

Based on Griffin and Massy, 1909

In the first genealogy, we find that whereas Ranjit is the sole inheritor of the preceding three generations, his great-grandfather's brother had twelve descendants in the third descending generation. On the one hand, such a family derived power from the large number of active males. On the other, it fragmented the patrimony because of the numerous legal claimants. In the case of the Bhangis, there are two separate families. While not as prolific as the Sindhanwalias, there was some amount of fragmentation.

Ranjit's father died when he himself was only twelve years old.[1] Ranjit's mother, who inherited a life interest in her husband's property as the surviving widow,[2] took over. But Ranjit soon decided, on grounds of her alleged immorality, to take over the Sukarchakia territories from her. His mother-in-law, who controlled the Kanhaya estates after her father-in-law's death, supported him at first. On her daughter's failure to bear a son to Ranjit Singh, she procured a child, we do not know from whom. When he returned from a campaign, the child was presented to him as his son. Ranjit Singh acquiesced, to avoid a

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1. Payne, 1915.
2. Griffin, 1869.

breach. Twelve years later, in 1820, when she asked that the growing prince be given an estate, Ranjit Singh suggested she give up her life-interest in the Kanhaya estates to the boy, and shortly after he annexed all her lands, of which he gave a part as jagir to the prince.

Early in his career, Ranjit Singh took Lahore and Amritsar from the Bhangis, disposing of his only real rivals. To confirm his right to their estates, he married two surviving widows of the Bhangi chiefs. Strictly speaking, only collaterals could inherit by marrying a widow. Ranjit Singh was powerful enough to modify the law about inheritance. This marriage to the Bhangi widows was a diplomatic move, giving his seizure of the Bhangi territories an appearance of legitimacy.

By 1809, Ranjit Singh controlled all the Sikh areas north of the Sutlej, except his mother-in-law's Kanhaya territories. He had tried to absorb the cis-Sutlej Sikh chiefdoms, but here he came up against the British who agreed to protect these chiefs from Ranjit Singh. In 1809, Ranjit Singh and the British agreed that the latter would protect the cis-Sutlej chiefs, and Ranjit Singh never again tried to absorb them. From then till his death in 1839 he was concerned to extend his territories into the Muslim areas, of Kashmir, Rawalpindi, the Indus river area, and Multan, and

into the Hindu Rajput chiefdoms in the eastern hills. The Punjab state, at his death, included the whole region between the Indus and the Sutlej, up to the territories of the Afghans of Kabul and of the British south of the Sutlej.

The centralisation of power by Ranjit was accomplished by important changes in land tenure, administration, and the army. We shall see that the main direction of change was from hereditary tenures in every field to appointment and allotment, often for life, but subject always to recall.

## The Army

By the time of Ranjit Singh, the Sikhs had become differentiated into warriors and cultivators, and the misl chiefs now had standing armies. These misl armies, predominantly cavalry, partly self-equipped, and with simple equipment, dependent on neighbourhood, religious, and almost certainly, kinship ties for cohesion rather than organisation and overhead control, persisted after the misl chiefs lost their independence. They constituted what was known, under Ranjit Singh as the Fauj-I-Be-Qawa'id ("Irregular army"), or Fauj-I-Sawari, ("Cavalry"). This was not the most effective arm of Ranjit Singh's army. Its members were paid a definite salary. They were divided into two sections. The Ghurchara

Khas ("Special Cavalry") consisted of landowners and cultivators, often relatives of court officials. They provided their own equipment. The Ghurchara Misldar consisted of the petty chiefs dispossessed by Ranjit Singh, leading their own bands of cavalry. This part of the army was a survival of the earlier form of military organisation and was little more than Ranjit Singh's sop to those he had dispossessed, and those he wished to flatter. Most of them were Jat Sikhs of the Manjha.[1]

The army directly organised by him was the Fauj-I-Qawa'id ("Regular Army"). The cavalry wing of this army was weak; the Sikhs who did join it could not take to the organised discipline with which Ranjit Singh was trying to form an army amenable to his general policy of centralisation. In the earlier stages, Sikhs hardly joined this force, which consisted mainly of Pathans, Rajputs and Dogras.

The infantry and artillery were very well organised and both were avoided by Sikhs. The infantry was recruited mainly from Afghans, Gurkhas, and Purbia (Eastern) Hindus, and Sikhs began to join only around 1818. French officers,

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1. Chopra, 1960, pp. 63-64. His information is from Catalogue of Oriental Public Library, Bankipur, Vol.VII, MS.No.622. Others were Hindu Rajputs of lower Kashmir, Jhelum Muslims, and a few Pathans and Brahmins.

joining in 1822, carried forward the organisation of men into battalions, and battalions into brigades. There was a regular arrangement of units and a formal hierarchy of functionaries, recruited often from among Sikh chiefs or landowners. They were, however, recruited, and did not hold office by hereditary right. The development of the artillery was at least as important as the concept of formal organisation as an innovation in military organisation. It was the most significant technological change in warfare among the Sikhs, one they had been able to adopt from the Muslims only towards the final decline of Afghan power in the Punjab. Sikhs joined this more willingly, but materials were less easy to obtain. Muslims, who had a much better knowledge of artillery, were recruited here to officers' posts, and the general command entrusted to Muslims or to Europeans.

The army of the centralised state diverged in two important aspects from the misl armies. It was formally organised, rendering it easy to control by a central authority. And it made use of men not belonging to the social system of the Sikhs themselves, men from the western Muslim tracts, and Hindus, including Gurkhas, from the eastern hills. This released the army organisation from the sanctions which kept power evenly distributed and prevented disruption of the

prevailing social strata. The increased political control through a centralised army did not in fact succeed in disrupting the social strata. It changed the political system from one of distributed, or dispersed, to centralised power. The centralised state however did not last very long. From 1839 to 1849, the politically fissiparous tendencies of caste or caste-type societies, again became apparent, for the centralised government weakened. There was however, no reversal to the old misl organisation during this period, and the army continued to exist as an organised body of soldiers. Cohesion however came not from centralised authority, but by reference to religion. This returned emphasis to Sikh warriors, and they organised themselves into influential panchayats, of the constitution of which not much is known. Military campaigns, and through them political policy, had to be ratified by these panchayats to achieve any degree of success.

Administration

If the army was made more manoeuvrable by the induction of outsiders, the administration was a completely manoeuvrable instrument of centralisation, by its inherent authoritarian nature and by recruitment always from the non-political layers

of society. Administration was not a clearly separated governmental function in the early misls. The local and misl chiefs were responsible for law and order. The only administrative functionary was the kotwal,[1] a local official of whose terms of office we are told nothing. Since one of his functions was to care for travellers, the office was probably created by the governments that had an interest in the trade that passed through this region. His responsibility to the local chief could only have developed after local chiefs replaced outside governments, either Mughal or Afghan. Local chiefs administered justice, and could punish with a sentence of death. There appears to have been a kind of feud to settle disputes, known as gaha.[2] But it could not have been a regular mode of settlement or there would be more reference to it.

The local chief might delegate some of his judicial powers to his jagirdars,[3] landowners endowed by him. Authority was however generally exercised by the chiefs themselves, and not delegated to a separate organisation. That the Sikhs recognised the importance of an administrative system is evident from their objection to the setting up by the English

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1. Gupta, 1944, Vol.III,p.132, quoting Asiatic Annual Register, 1809.
2. Sinha, 1946, p.151.
3. Gupta, 1944, Vol.III,p.146.

of a judicial tribunal at Ludhiana cantonment, ostensibly to protect Englishmen in Sikh territory. They saw it as a "forerunner of their subjugation". "However guarded and however limited its jurisdiction it would be universally considered as a prelude to the introduction of an whole judicial system, the forerunner of their subjugation or extirpation, and the annexation of their country to the British dominions."[1]

In Punjab, the development of a separate administration followed on the acquisition of centralised power. This is the process of "consolidation" after conquest referred to in history texts. Precedents for an administrative system existed in the set-up of the Mughal government. The Mughals had relied on Muslims for military service, but they entrusted administration very largely to Hindus. In most northern provinces, some one caste or two has provided bureaucrats for the Muslim governments, such as Kayasthas in the Ganges valley, Amils in Sind. In Punjab, they drew on Brahmins or on Khatris who were usually occupied in trade. These same families, and many others, were drawn on by Ranjit Singh to provide civil servants for his administration. As in the case of the non-Sikhs wings of the army, the use of non-Sikhs

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1. Letter from Ochterlony to Edmonstone, No.66 in Book 13 of Punjab Government Record Office, quoted by Farooqi, 1941, p.40.

in the administration rendered it a more effective medium of control of the region. The use of non-Sikhs is explained thus by Griffin,[1] ....."it was virtually impossible to carry on a complex administration without making use of the only classes, Muhammadans and Brahmans, who had any hereditary capacity for government." The genetic explanation, if patently absurd, underlines the almost total exclusion of Sikhs from administration. Such exclusion arose directly from the kind of interactions existing among Sikhs, as much as from conscious central policy. These could only be political, that is segmentary, and were inherently liable to changes in balance, with no permanent or even stable form of dominance. The domination implied in authority relations is necessarily stable and relatively permanent. Also it requires the acceptance of the dominated, even if such acceptance is dictated only by the ultimate threat of superior force. Acceptance of domination was acceptance of inequality, which would be a direct negation of the bases of cohesion of Sikhs. These bases were formally their religious tenets, and informally their caste equivalence.

Given the force that backed the administration, it was easier for both the central authority and for the subjects

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1. Griffin, 1892, p.115.

to accept Hindus in positions of authority. They were more amenable to manipulation, could be appointed on purely functional grounds, and dismissed without setting in motion disruptive undercurrents in the society. They also mediated, or earthed, resentment against a central authority that emerged at the expense of others. For the ruled, the status differences within the community remained always informal. The formally ranked administrative system which could have formalised status differences was recruited from outside, as was the case with the formally organised sections of the army. The alternative system of ranking created by the centralised power and its organisation was thus not allowed to infiltrate the Sikh system of ranking which as we saw was a very informal one, and was in fact unsanctioned.

From 1808, five daftars or offices were set up. These dealt with revenues, official expenditure, domestic expenditure, army expenditure, and daily expenses.[1] Accounts were maintained in each daftar of all income and expenditure. By 1839, the number of daftars grew to twelve, all supervised by Ranjit Singh, and controlled by men who were part of his court. Some of them, especially the daftar for revenues, grew to large proportions, with a hierarchy of local officials

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1. Chopra, 1960, pp. 76-84.

in each village or group of villages which was headed by a collector, assisted by foremen, assessors, and registrars.

The state was divided into the provinces of Lahore, Multan, Kashmir, and Peshawar. The first two had well-organised administrations. The latter two were colonies, held with difficulty and of interest mainly as a source of tribute. The weakness of the centralised power here was reflected inits inability to develop an administrative system.

Judicial functions in the centralised state were also centralised, but not separated from administrative functions. Appeals from local village panchayats could go up to the kardars, or vollectors, and to higher officials in the cities. The next court of appeal was a special institution, the Adalat-ul-Ala at Lahore. The fact that little is known about this probably means that it was never very important. The final court of appeal was the Darbar of Ranjit Singh, where he heard complaints against officials of all ranks. The Darbar, while it prevented oppression by officials, also gave Ranjit Singh a greater control over his administration. Civil disputes were often referred to the administration, for evidence might be found in its records, relating to loans, land, etc. Disputes over marriage would

be settled locally with reference to customary law.[1] Criminal offences were more likely to be sent up to as high a level as possible, even to the Darbar,[2] and theoretically the death sentence could only be passed by Ranjit Singh.[3]

Land Tenures

Tenures of land lost their inviolability. Before Ranjit Singh, land - whether inherited or acquired - was generally regarded as the inalienable property of the owner, to be divided among his sons. In most cases, inherited lands did not exceed the area of one village. These hereditary lands were usually respected as such by Ranjit Singh, and even by the British after 1848. But acquired lands, which in the case of local and misl chiefs could be extensive, were not accepted by him as hereditary tenures, though he did not interfere with the tenure for the contemporary owner's lifetime unless he was guilty of a serious misdemeanour. Griffin and Massy's "Chiefs and Families of Note in the Punjab",[4] is full of references to the dispossession of heirs, or to escheat on failure of heirs, by Ranjit Singh. The Sardars

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1. Chopra, 1960.p.90.
2. Ganda Singh, 1952.
3. Chopra, 1960. p.90.
4. Griffin and Massy, 1909.

Hari Singh Nalwa, Fateh Singh Kalianwalia and others had served faithfully in his army. But when they died, their sons were set aside on various grounds, and at times on none. In this way, he weakened all the possible local centres of power that might at any time grow into rivals. At the same time he enriched himself, and increased his capacity to support a paid and organised army and administration.

Land tenures, given for life or for the length of a term of office were a common mode of payment. Officials of both army and administration were given such tenures and these might be added to, or decreased, according to the value placed on their services. Payment in this form was a less effective means of control in the long run, since recurrent changes in ownership are procedurally cumbersome and uneconomic. Ownership would tend to become hereditary, partly because of this, partly because of earlier patterns of tenure, and partly because no systematic attempt was made to terminate hereditary tenures once and for all.

The parallels with Travancore are obvious. The development of a bureaucratic administrative system, the reorganisation of the army from a group of followers belonging to a hereditary stratum of warriors into a centrally paid,

graded, and organised one, and the recruitment of "foreigners" to both army and administration are common to both.

The problems arising out of a comparison of centralisation in Kerala and Punjab are several. We have classed the social systems of both as caste systems. We also find that they are roughly contemporary in time, the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries. The similarity of the processes of centralisation could arise from the fact of caste, which is the present hypothesis and is fully discussed in the last chapter. It is not however impossible that the historical forces of the times, especially the decline of the Mughals and the rising competition of Europeans for trade and political control were the cause of this concurrence. At least one other instance of political centralisation, the Maratha empire, dates to roughly the same period, lending support to the argument. The variable - the specific historical period - can only be evaluated by comparison with studies of centralisation in other historical periods.

# CHAPTER V

## Conclusion

The major hypothesis of the present work is that political power in a traditional caste society is necessarily dispersed, and that centralisation of power is incompatible with caste stratification. The proof of this hypothesis has been attempted by detailed description of two such societies, and by citing some general theses about power and society, especially Smith's analysis of government and Andrzejewski's discussion of the relation of military organisation to social structure, the latter offering a strong and independent confirmation of the proffered hypothesis.

The best description of traditional caste society, derived strangely enough (or perhaps very appropriately) from intensive empirical knowledge of modern caste, is the one given by Bailey in his "Closed Social Stratification in India".[1] We saw earlier that according to him traditional Indian society "was divided into countless small political units, which I shall call 'blocks', because they could be arranged and rearranged to make larger units. While the

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1. Bailey, 1963b.

larger units are segmentary (in the sense that any feudal state is segmentary....) the blocks were organic, relatively stable, and relatively indestructible. Blocks had these characteristics because ritual, political and economic systems reinforced one another and to some extent coincided, and because kinship links did not cross the boundaries of the unit."[1]

Bailey takes the small-scale political unit and not a wider region as a complete social system.[2] That Bailey is referring to a linguistic region is apparent in his reference to "two castes which bore the same name." He never, however, explicitly refers to a linguistic region, or indeed to any wider boundary within which the blocks interacted. The evidence from Kerala and the Punjab suggests that the blocks, or their combinations, in any one linguistic region, were roughly symmetrical, and that the typical political interactions between blocks or their combinations did not extend to blocks from neighbouring linguistic areas. Further, whereas for most castes, kinship relations were confined to the

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1. Ibid.,p.108.
2. Bailey, 1963a, p.132. See quotation on p. Chapter I.

block, in the ruling caste kinship ties through adoption or marriage were formed across the region. The limits on the establishment of such ties were the physical possibilities of communication, but these were less important than the strategy of political alliances. Adoption and marriage arrangements did not require continuous contact. The regional span of ruling-caste kinship affiliation supports the argument that a region was a society with a political structure of a certain, here non-centralised, kind. This is roughly Miller's hypothesis, that the higher the status of a caste, the greater its mobility.[1] Looked at from the point of view of caste strata and not political organisation, we find that the regional society was integrated at the higher caste levels (Miller's spatially mobile because ritually pure Brahmins,[2] and my ruling caste linked by marriages, more often adoptions, and in other ways).

To return to Bailey's definition,[3] it is important because it takes account of the small-scale political units

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1. Miller, 1954.
2. Ibid.
3. Bailey, 1963b.

that made up the system, and refers to their segmentary interaction with each other. We have had earlier discussions of horizontal and vertical solidarity (Srinivas, Pocock),[1] which brought out the role of the dominant caste as the locus of power in a region. But the dominant caste of modern times, which includes among its various distinguishing criteria one relevant to an electoral system (numbers, or voting strength) is not the same thing as the ruling caste, usually very small in size, but they need to manipulate larger castes if they are to retain dominance in an elective system of government. The traditional ruling caste did not need to resort to defensive manipulation of other, larger, non-ruling castes. Its members ruled by customary right, and retained power by ownership of land and other resources, by control over lower castes who provided military and other services, and by acceptance of their traditional right to chiefly powers and privileges. The ruling caste showed no solidarity viś-a-viś other castes. "Dominant caste" implies horizontal solidarity of some degree. Dominance per

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1. Srinivas, 1955, pp. 32-33; Pocock, 1957.

caste must correlate with subservience per caste. The ruling caste of the traditional society had no horizontal solidarity (in the sense of combination for political action versus other castes); it had a virtual monopoly of formal power in relation to other castes and all formal political action occurred within it, among and between its members. Other castes had no recognised political stathres, they did not participate in the typical political interactions of chiefdoms at the level of policy-making, and they could not combine across political boundaries and so upset the balance of power between the chiefdoms. In other words, the competition for power took place within the ruling caste, and nowhere else.

In contrast to this, in modern society there is no ruling (or sovereign) caste. There are, however, powerful or dominant castes, that is, castes more powerful relative to castes. Insofar as hierarchy persists, and the dominant caste is relatively unchallenged in its control of local resources, competition is still confined to it, giving rise to the well-known phenomenon of factions, created and led by members of the dominant caste and dependents all along the caste scale.[1] These are vertical segments just like

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1. This is not necessarily true of state or even district level politics. It is true of village politics, as we know from Oscar Lewis, 1958; Pocock, 1957.

the old chiefdoms though they lack formal political status, specific political privileges, and, most important, any kind of sovereignty in the form of an independent army, or administration. On the operational level, we might say that such a system is, very roughly, continuous with the old. It is still traditional, when the divisions run vertically. The dominant caste, however, is in the modern economic and political situation not always able to retain its control of local resources,[1] in which case the competition moves out of its ranks, and involves other castes. In such a situation, conflict becomes caste-centred, and the castes, or horizontal segments, become competing groups. These may develop into the caste-association described by Bailey.[2] This, as he had pointed out, is the vital difference between the old and the new caste systems - the shifting of conflict from between vertical units to horizontal ones, or in Bailey's terms, a shift from caste groups to caste associations.

To return to the discussion of the regional system, in addition to real or supposed kinship ties linking members of the ruling caste, and common caste names, which we could call horizontal identity, we have several other integrative factors that justify the argument that the blocks were units

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1. Including such modern resources as formal education.
2. Bailey, 1963b, pp. 122-123.

of a system, social and political, and not so many independent entities. The most important perhaps is the contained conflict among blocks, its nature, and its specific causes. We have seen that a very important cause of wars in Kerala was disputes between chiefs over ritual and managerial rights in temples. The sending of chavers to Tirunavayi at the mahamakham ritual is the most outstanding instance of such disputes.[1] Less striking but very similar occurrences are to be found all through Kerala history up to 1792, and they had no overt connection with, for example, economic competition. In fact, in the period (Portuguese onwards) when economic competition became not only overt but also far more intense, wars over ritual things became less frequent. That there was economic change in Kerala from the time of the arrival of the Moors, we can safely assume, and can relate much of the strategy of conflict of that time (two to three centuries before the Portuguese) to the change. Unfortunately, we know so little about the period before this that we cannot postulate that at any time Kerala had a perfectly stable,

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1. See Chapter III.

unchanging economy in which wars overtly about temples, et cetera, had no latent economic motives. In any case, the temples in themselves, as owners of large estates, must have been worth controlling in a pre-trade, agricultural economy, so that ostensible conflict about ritual privileges in fact concealed strong economic motivation.

The important point to note in conflicts about temple management is that they ramified into the social system. They involved observance of a common set of rules about ritual things, which were applied regardless of the power of individual chiefs, and derived their sanctions from a wider system of stratification and its supporting values. The temple ritual and the main burden of management lay with the Brahmins, who were accepted as the ritually purest caste everywhere in Kerala. The Brahmins, in addition to the quality of ritual purity ascribed to them in the overall system of values, were the largest landowners in Kerala, together with the chiefs. They were however more numerous than the chiefs, and though we have no statistics, before the Mysore and British upheavals the term jenmi, or landowner, implied a Brahmin. Tradition claimed that all the land belonged by original right (dating from Parasuvama's having created the coast and settled Brahmins on it) to Brahmins,

and most of the land was held, judging from all records, by only three categories of owners - temples, Brahmins, and chiefs. Ritual sanctions relating to temples and supported by Brahmins would to that extent be more effective, for their control of land gave them a control over all those who made a living out of it. As a non-political category, both formally and actually, they were not subject to factionalisation over power, and held a status position vis-a-vis the whole society. One might here postulate horizontal solidarity, but apart from the fact of their common interest in maintaining their ritual status, and indeed the whole system of castes ranked within a scale of ritual values, which they were able to do as the law-givers, and by their control of temples and ritual, we do not know that they combined, in a modern sense, for political action. Brahmins did not have territorial sub-castes as did the Nayars, for example, but were identified by social origin - Nambudiris from Kerala, Pottis from Canara, Pattars from Tamilnad, or some smaller castes of Brahmins of different, usually lower, status. These tended to have a territorial distribution but were not territorially segmented. Here, therefore, was a level of the social system - the highest - at which we find an integration of the structure and the provision of

some part of the framework of rules and limitations within which conflict took place. Specifically, temples and Brahmins were inviolable in war, which was a major form of expression of conflict. Nor were Brahmins normally warriors.

Conflict in itself is no criterion of the existence of one structure or several. The kind of conflict does provide a criterion. Where the conflict is regularly recurrent, even if at infrequent intervals, and where it occurs along certain normal and normative lines, within a framework of stated or unstated rules and limitations, it occurs within a structure where in fact conflict is contained in such a way that it does not impair or radically change the structure. It is obviously compatible with the system and is, per the present hypothesis, necessary to its functioning.

The Kerala and Punjab type of conflict, up to 1729 in Kerala, and up to 1793 in Punjab, was of this kind, and provides an empirical, non-cultural basis for regarding each of these regions as complete, or integrated (if loosely) social systems.[1] In Kerala wars were fought to certain rules,

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1. A similar system existed in Maharashtra before its centralisation by Shivaji in the late seventeenth century.

derived from ecological necessity, religious values, attitudes to property and (chief) kingship, hereditary political rights and privileges. At the informal level the political units, embedded in an overall system of stratification, tended to maintain a balance of power by strategic alliances and hostilities without which the system of stratification could not be maintained in its existing form. If the layered structure was to persist, power must be spread through the controlling layer. If the balance of power were not so maintained, and there was any tendency to individual (or family, in the Indian context) monopoly of power, the existence of strata would be threatened, since a monopoly of power would require a strong vertical axis of government to maintain itself. Such a government must be independent of the status system if it was to be an effective instrument of control. This would provide an alternative status system of office holders, which by its very nature would be to some degree open, or allowing mobility, and thus end the immediate and exclusive relation of status to caste strata.

In our Kerala (Travancore) example of centralisation, the problem of how to set up a bureaucracy in an essentially

caste society was solved by employing "foreigners" from the east coast. This meant the local hierarchy of castes was intact, and local mobility in status still inhibited. The ruling family, on the other hand, never reached a position where it needed to break with its caste. There were still powerful Kshatriyas in Kerala who could and did contest Travancore's attempt to absorb other political units. Indeed, we are not sure that Travancore would have tried, even given enough resources, to absorb its full status equivalents. It certainly supported them against opposition external to Kerala, instead of joining the latter to absorb them under its own control. An obvious limiting factor to a region-wide expansion would be poor resources, including military and administrative personnel suitable for such expansion. Allowing for this, I would say caste stratification also inhibited extensive centralisation where it might entail absorption of caste equals - equal not only in ritual rank but also in political status.

Some confirmation of this is available in the Punjab situation. The absorption by the Sukarchakia misl of all the others north of the Sutlej was complete. The misls were led by families of roughly equal status and, originally, almost equal resources in land and men. The

Sukarchakia acquired an edge over other misls in these resources - like Travancore, although for different reasons and in different ways. It finally mastered all Punjab. The caste situation in Punjab, we saw, was relatively fluid. Castes had traditions - and genealogies of families - showing considerable migration, mainly from Rajasthan, dating back at times to three or four centuries, so that the territorial segmentation of castes, so evident in Kerala, never developed to the same extent here. The history of the region, with the frequent invasions from the north, must also have contributed to this. There was always some amount of physical mobility. Further, the particular groups involved in the exercise of, and competition for, power were all Sikhs. While they retained some of their original caste status and attributes, after conversion to Sikhism they accepted its beliefs which included the ritual equality of all adherents. The Sikh situation was therefore one that allowed for flexibility because, one, the Sikh group at least initially was a religious association, formed for a specific purpose and not coinciding with any group in the organic society; two, its formal dissociation with any such group, indeed with the whole system of such (caste) groups. On an analogy with Kerala, the chances of

successful organisation of bureaucracy would be greater here. Indeed, the Sikh centralisation was more extensive, comparatively speaking, and more complete than in Kerala, though here again we find a "foreign" non-Sikh bureaucracy forming the main instrument of consolidation of centralised power. In so far as Sikhs themselves formed one stratum without overt hierarchical differences they were unsuitable for bureaucracy, though other reasons may also be advanced for this, including cultural ones, such as Sikh martial tradition.

Centralisation of power is incompatible with caste stratification, partly because it would break up a ruling stratum and bring in mobility - for the rising family or "centraliser", thus endangering the whole basis of caste ascription, partly because it cannot achieve any lasting success without some form of bureaucratisation. Where a bureaucracy is locally recruited, it poses a direct threat to caste ascription by providing an alternative mode of allocating status, and one that like centralisation of power, permits mobility.

This argument raises a number of questions about modern caste systems, which are all subject to some degree of bureaucratisation. Are local and state administrations

recruited to any extent from an "external" area? If not, do they threaten caste stratification? Or does the location of power in the people themselves, and the permissive dispersal of power in a multiple-party system, lessen the centralising effect of bureaucracy and so perpetuate caste stratification, by allowing factions in dominant castes to continue their arguments through political party alignments, especially at the village and district levels? How does centrally controlled bureaucracy affect local caste systems? Is it comparable to the "foreign" bureaucracies of Travancore and Punjab? To answer any or all of these questions would be a thesis in itself, and beyond the present work.

If we go back in time to the ancient Hindu empires, again we have the problem of how they were formed, and how held together. "The typical state system of Hindu India was one in which a king loosely controlled a number of powerful vassals, who in turn were masters of lesser lords, in a descending scale down to petty village chieftains. With minor changes in its character, and with only occasional and temporarily successful efforts at establishing more centralised control, this system continued down to the days of the East India Company, and indeed it did not entirely vanish until after the great events of 1947."[1] This

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1. Basham, 1958, pp.7-8.

accurately, if briefly, describes the system in Kerala and, with modifications, in Punjab. Basham does not accept that climate, lack of communications, absence of a sense of history, or other-worldliness account for such a system. Lack of communications is the only factor worth some anthropological consideration, and is certainly cited by Bailey as a relevant factor in traditional caste systems. Basham, however, points to the similar lack of communications in Rome and China, both of which had well-developed bureaucracies. Basham explains it thus, "I believe that the main reason for the failure of Hindu and Muslim alike was that no Indian ruler or dynasty was capable of providing administrative machinery adequate to control a really large state."[1] Basham however has over-simplified the situation, perhaps intentionally. He makes no reference to the social base out of which the Hindu and Muslim governments had to be formed. For example, Muslim government in a largely Hindu area must have the same problems as a Hindu government. In a Muslim area, it would develop a different, probably more centralised, form. In the light of the preceding discussion, caste must be a major variable in the formation and

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1. Op.cit., p.10.

development of both Hindu and Muslim governments. The absence of administrative development explains the failure of centralisation, but needs itself to be explained. I maintain that such development militated against caste stratification, hence the transience of empires.

This of course engenders a further question, of some theoretical interest. Why, in caste societies, do attempts at centralisation appear again and again? We know something about how they are carried through, but why they occur is extremely difficult to answer. Can one postulate an inherent tendency in all human societies for concentrations of power to build up? So that economic expansion lead to the progressive growth of political systems, from small segments into a larger unit, which again merges with other like units? The comparative study of political systems, and their directions of change could yield evolutionary hypotheses that would he more fruitful than the ones put forward by investigators of, for example, kinship and marriage, in the last century.

I referred earlier to a framework of rules and limitations within which political conflict occurred. The common acceptance of these was confined to Kerala,

though some were typical of other Hindu systems. "It was legitimate, indeed worthy, for a king to attack and defeat his neighbour. To depose the conquered king and annex his territory was a breach of the dharma of kings, and a great sin."[1] This was exactly the case in Kerala up to 1729, and only after that was this rule consistently broken by Martanda Varma of Travancore (described variously as ruthlessly cruel, and a great Kerala patriot). The rule ensured the continuity of political statuses even though the content of their power may have varied at different periods. The lists of Kerala chiefly families provided by early Portuguese and Dutch[2] writers correspond with remarkable accuracy to the chiefly families dealt with by the English in 1792.[3] With this general principle went other rules that ensured continuity. The persons of the chief and his kin, or more accurately of all members of a ruling family, were safeguarded by the custom of avenging the death of a prince or chief of the other camp. Such vengeance was almost always exacted, even if it took some years, and it did not spark off a continuing feud.

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1. Basham, 1958, p.12.
2. Heer van Rede, for example, who was Comissary-General for Affairs of the Dutch East India Company in 1694,A.D., whose list is reproduced in Hamilton (1737), 1930 ed.,pp.161-162. See Appendix II.
3. Report of a Joint Commission, 1792.

It was more in the nature of a retributive punishment. The killing of a chiefly personage in war was therefore separated out as a recognised crime, and was definitely not included in war strategy. Another guarantee of continuity was the structure of ruling families. The formal political statuses, or sthanams, were held collectively by the family, and allotted by simple seniority. Rights in both property and formal status were impartible. Where a family expanded and split into segments or branches, each of these held its own estates, but the formal statuses and political sovereignty over the chiefdom, and control of vassals were vested in the whole family, including its branches, though effective control may pass either regularly into the hands of sthamis, or irregularly, to some branch or branches which have somehow become more powerful than the others. Svarupams (ruling families) almost never became extinct. The impartiality of the family meant there was always a plentiful supply of adult males to fill up sthanams. Where there was any danger of extinction, (once in the Zamorin family, frequently in Travancore) adoptions were made from any friendly ruling family of the same caste.

The legitimacy of war as a mode of political activity was generally recognised. Every chief, with some territorial sovereignty, had a right to maintain an army, and to war with any other chief as his own resources or strategy dictated. There was no sanction preventing or discouraging armed conflict between a powerful chief and his vassal, except the former's greater resources, and a vassal, even if he initiated the conflict, could not be punished by any formal legal or customary procedure. This right to war and an independent army was an aspect of the dispersal of power, and its general prevalence contributed to continuity of political statuses even where these were of a lower order both formally and in content.

An extremely important rule concerning part of political activity - war - was that only Nayars be used as warriors. This was not a formal rule enforced by law, nor was it supported by ritual values about the duties of the different varnas. In any case, not all the chiefs were of the Kshatriya varna. On the other hand the Nayars, who made up the bulk of the warriors, were only Sudras. We might consider it rather as part of the built-in economic pattern of a caste society. Occupations were specialised

by caste, and the warrior's arts were one of these occupations. The Nayar armies are our most important clue to the kind of political structure we are dealing with.

We now take up Andrzejewski's argument about the relation of military organisation to social structure.[1] His position is that military factors affect the distribution of power, that is, the "territorial concentration or dispersion of power respectively", (as opposed to the functional and the competitive distribution of power). In a discussion of what he calls the Military Participation Ratio (the proportion of army personnel to the population), and social stratification, he says M.P.R. affects the balance of power, and will exert a levelling influence, or a stratifying one according to whether the warriors are equipped and paid by the state or not. "....if they are equipped and maintained by the government, they are, as a rule, also fitted into an army organised by the government and commanded by officers appointed by it, and not left in their territorial or kinship units under the command of their tribal or elected leaders. They

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1. Andrzejewski, 1953, (published 1954).

can thus be disciplined..."[1] His general thesis is that where the army is recruited from a hereditary stratum, it strengthens stratification, and vice versa. A conclusion of greater interest to us is that certain factors encourage, or support, the dispersion of power. All these are mainly military factors, such as who pays the soldiers and how, technology and technique, communications, and organisation, elaborated upon below. The hereditary stratum of warriors is not included by him in this list, as it certainly ought to have been. It is closely linked to the military factors. Such a stratum is consistent with a strategy of defence rather than attack, one of the factors making for dispersion per Andrzejewski. It has established military roles which imply an established strategy and consequent limitations on expansion. It must also carry established rights as a stratum, and a policy of attack would possibly on the one hand increase its power and so upset both its internal balance and its position vis-a-vis other strata. Established, and therefore circumscribed, rights might be replaced by a scramble for power, during which there may occur considerable

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1. Andrzejewski, 1953, p.58.

structural realignment in power, where there is a change not in the centres which among them hold the balance of power, but in the kind of balance of power itself. On the other hand, a policy of attack would take it outside its own social boundaries where its hereditary position in the home region would not give any kind of power and prestige, and the warrior stratum would have to rely on sheer force and organisation. A hereditary stratum, held together by organic ties of kinship and marriage, reinforced by common political and economic interests, was hardly fitted for such a summons of force and organisation.

Other factors, discussed by Andrzejewski,[1] also determined the distribution of power.

The second factor that contributes to dispersion is lack of good communications which spatially limit the area of operation of an army. A hereditary stratum of warriors is unlikely to survive the improvement of communications which makes possible an expansion of military activity and with it the size of an army. Arms and organisation also affect power. If it is the superiority of individual warriors over others that gives them power as

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1. Ibid.,1953.

a stratum, it is dispersed. If it is as an organised group that they dominate, they are more likely to centralise. This can be put in another way, in terms of the horizontal and vertical axes of government, where the warriors are all of relatively similar status, as would be the case in a hereditary stratum, power is dispersed or segmented. Where they are organised into an authoritative structure, and subject to a definite leadership, obviously power is centralised, and the warriors are more liable to changes in status through movement in the army hierarchy. Even if such statuses are held on some kind of hereditary tenure, and changes limited thereby, the warriors no longer form one stratum in society, but may form a separate series of strata, or be derived from the several strata of society.

The monopoly of superior techniques by a group or individual enables it to centralise, but continued monopoly of technique is only possible where there is a very wide technological gap, unbridged by cultural communication, between the ruling group and the ruled. This applies therefore mainly to colonial, and not to indigenous empire-building. Complexity of techniques may however reinforce the position of a central power. Payment was quite crucial in determining the extent of central control, as was equipment.

Where warriors depended directly on the centre for remuneration in cash or kind, central control could develop an authority structure and manipulate warriors to further its own policies. Where warriors equipped themselves, and where they were maintained not directly by the centre but on hereditary tenures of land, they were obviously less amenable to organisation and discipline. A hereditary warrior stratum would tend to have stable hereditary tenures, whether as owner or some kind of tenant, of land. Any other form of remuneration, such as life tenures in land or salaries, which were not hereditary, would entail a certain amount of both social and spatial mobility, and break up a stratum.

All the military factors cited by Andrzejewski as conducive to dispersion of power are also the ones that make for a hereditary stratum, or caste, of warriors. We have an almost syllogistic argument to support the hypothesis that caste stratification makes for a system of dispersed power. Any region in India that has a traditional military caste must have dispersed or uncentralised power. Most regions are known to have had such castes. For those of which we are not certain, we cannot say they never had military castes but only that if they had them, they have so completely and for

so long ceased to be warriors that even the tradition of their being so is lost. It would be reasonable to assume that the old caste societies generally had a warrior stratum. From this however, we cannot deduce that caste stratification per se goes with dispersion of power. The traditional warrior caste is not always identifiable in present-day caste societies especially where for many centuries such castes have taken to other occupations.

Are caste societies necessarily politically segmented and warring (and by warring we would also mean factionalised, where conflict falls short of war)? The answer is yes. Members of a ruling caste share political power in their region, and they must do so roughly as equals if they are to maintain control over other castes or strata. The exclusive monopoly of power by one family would mean the removal of the checks on power provided by the constant opposition of like segments, and would enable it to manipulate the status system. The element of mobility so introduced would obviously be the germ of structural change. In fact, some manipulation of the status system is recorded by historians of ancient India, where a king could raise groups to higher caste status. This was more manipulation within the system, of social

personnel, but not a manipulation of the whole system, such as would be represented by creating an administration, or an army, completely independent of the caste system. Such an opening up of the status system would entail the end of caste as the exclusive indicator of status. We might then see Indian societies as showing a tendency throughout their history to centralise, but this tendency was always checked because it conflicted with caste stratification. It is no coincidence that the old Hindu empires achieved such measure of centralisation as they did by denying at some stage of their development the validity of caste stratification, and that they did not succeed in a complete centralisation insofar as the caste structure set a limit on their policies. Both Buddhism and Jainism were propagated by ancient and medieval Hindu rulers who had embarked on a policy of expansion and centralisation, and who were probably using these for their political ends. The Mauryas, especially Aśoka (269 to 232 B.C.) propagated Buddhism,[1] while Jainism became "virtually the state religion"[2] in parts of south

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1. Basham, 1954.
2. Ibid., p.77.

India in the medieval period - up to the 16th century.[1] These religions have been regarded as revolts by ruling warrior groups against Brahmins and Hinduism.[2] I suggest that they were used by centralising monarchs to consolidate central control over territorial extensions, such territorial extension and its control from the centre representing a threat to the existence of hereditary ruling strata, and thence to the whole system of stratification, including its ritual evaluations, and the position of the Brahmins. Invariably, these attempts at centralisation failed to change the system of stratification, and the Hindu empires reverted to the original, politically fragmented system consistent with caste stratification.

This raises problems about the effect of caste systems. Does an impersonal, salaried, non-hereditary bureaucratic government provide an alternative mode of status evaluation thus weakening the ritual basis of caste stratification? On the other hand, how far does caste stratification inhibit the working of a bureaucracy, and its development. A bureaucratic organisation makes possible effective control from a centre. In India now

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1. Basham, 1954, p.XX.
2. Ibid.,p.246, Basham thinks this is only partly true.

there exists an organised, bureaucratic administration, controlled by the central government. According to the present hypothesis, political centralisation is incompatible with caste stratification. We need to know in what ways caste stratification is giving in, or changing, because of centralisation. Or does it persist and make centralisation difficult?

## Appendix I

Recipients of English pensions, as arranged from the early nineteenth century. (Based on Logan, Vol.II, 1887, Appendix XX, and Ayyar, 1938, Appendix II.)

The Zamorins and their dependent, or allied, chiefs:

| | Rupees | annas | pies |
|---|---|---|---|
| **The Zamorins of Calicut** | **1,32,163** | **4** | **0** |
| 1. The Zamorin, or chief sthanam | 69,663 | 4 | 0 |
| 2. Eralpad or second sthanam | 15,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 3. Munnalpad or third sthanam | 7,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 4. Edattralpad or fourth sthanam | 5,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 5. Nedutralpad or fifth sthanam | 4,500 | 0 | 0 |
| 6. Ambadi princess, chief female sthanam | 4,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 7. Putiya Palace, senior princess | 9,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 8. Padinyare Palace, senior princess | 9,000 | 0 | 0 |
| 9. Kizhakke Palace, senior princess | 9,000 | 0 | 0 |

The Zamorin, out of his pension, had to pay his dependents as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Punattur chief, feudatory | 4,994 | 8 | 0 |
| 2. Tirumanasseri's Brahmin chief, feudatory | 1,028 | 9 | 4 |
| 3. Kutiravattattu Nayar, a leading military commander | 982 | 0 | 0 |
| 4. Venganad Nampati, a frontier commander | 859 | 0 | 0 |
| 5. Manakkulam chief, branch of Punattur | 457 | 2 | 4 |
| 6. Azhuvancheri Tamprakkal, leading Kerala Nambudiri | 342 | 13 | 8 |
| 7. Eliyangad chief | 342 | 13 | 8 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 8. | Chittanhur chief, branch of Punattur | 228 - 9 - 4 |
| 9. | Chief priest of Tirunavayi | 200 - 0 - 0 |
| 10. | Tamme Panikkar, family's military instructor | 102 - 14 - 0 |
| 11. | Kotachirakkal Adhyan | 85 - 11 - 8 |
| 12. | Mangat Achan, hereditary chief minister | 57 - 2 - 4 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <u>The Kurumbranad Family</u> | | <u>5,824 - 0 - 0</u> |
| (no sthanams mentioned) | | |
| 1. | Ramamangalatta Palace male head | 4,000 - 0 - 0 |
| 2. | Mutirakkal Palace Senior Princess | 420 - 0 - 0 |
| 3. | " " Junior Princess | 180 - 0 - 0 |
| 4. | Mallisseri " Senior Princess | 480 - 0 - 0 |
| 5. | " " male head | 600 - 0 - 0 |
| 6. | Kolapatta " Senior Princess | 144 - 0 - 0 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| <u>The Beypore Family</u> | | <u>3,034 - 1 - 1</u> |
| 1. | Chief sthanam | 1,725 - 14 - 4 |
| 2. | Second sthanam | 276 - 11 - 5 |
| 3. | Third sthanam | 223 - 1 - 2 |
| 4. | Fourth sthanam | 151 - 10 - 3 |
| 5. | Manayatt Palace Princess | 142 - 13 - 0 |
| 6. | Nediyal " " | 142 - 13 - 0 |
| 7. | Panangatt " " | 142 - 13 - 0 |
| 8. | Putiya " " | 142 - 13 - 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Parappanad Family** | **4.114 - 4 - 8** |
| 1. Valu Putiya Palace Chief | 3,085 - 11 - 6 |
| 2. Valu Putiya Palace Princess | 1,028 - 9 - 2 |
| **The Payyormala Nayars** | **5.825 - 1 - 0** |
| 1. Avinyatt Nayar | 4,085 - 4 - 2 |
| 2. Kuttali Nayar | 1,766 - 12 - 10 |

**The Kolathiris and their dependent, or allied, chiefs:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Chirakkal (Kolatburi) Family** | **22,127 - 1 - 5** |
| (No sthanams mentioned. See text, Chapter II) | |
| 1. Chief (Chirakkal Palace) | 12,475 - 0 - 2 |
| 2. Tevanankott Palace male head | 1,400 - 0 - 0 |
| 3. " " female head | 2,993 - 12 - 0 |
| 4. Kavinisseri Palace male head | 1,496 - 14 - 0 |
| 5. Padinyara " | 1,496 - 14 - 0 |
| 6. Chenga " " " | 170 - 13 - 3 |
| 7. Udayamangalam " " " | 500 - 0 - 0 |
| **The Kottayam Family** (No sthanams mentioned) | 5,900 - 0 - 0 |
| 1. Tekka Palace male head | 1,250 - 0 - 0 |
| 2. " " female head | 500 - 0 - 0 |
| 3. Padniyara Palace female head | 1,750 - 0 - 0 |
| 4. Kizhakke " " " | 1,650 - 0 - 0 |
| 5. " " junior prince | 750 - 0 - 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Kadattanad Family** | **26,441 - 0 - 0** |
| 1. Porlathiri chief sthanam | 13,801 - 0 - 0 |
| 2. Second sthanam | 4,000 - 0 - 0 |
| 3. Chief female sthanam | 600 - 0 - 0 |
| 4. Ayancheri Palace Senior Princess | 4,020 - 0 - 0 |
| 5. Edavalatta Palace Senior Princess | 1,610 - 9 - 2 |
| **Kottayam's dependent: Pulavayi Nayar** | 1,610 - 9 - 2 |
| **The Iruvalinad Nambiars** | **6,695 - 14 - 6** |
| 1. Kizhakedatta male head | 1,191 - 9 - 6 |
| 2. Mittangott female " | 595 - 12 - 9 |
| 3. Kampratta male " | 791 - 9 - 6 |
| 4. " female " | 400 - 0 - 0 |
| 5. Chandroth male " | 315 - 0 - 0 |
| 6. " female " and a male | 280 - 12 - 9 |
| 7. Narangoli male head | 835 - 15 - 0 |
| 8. " Ramatta branch male head | 278 - 10 - 4 |
| 9. " Puttalatta branch male head | 278 - 10 - 4 |
| 10. " Mallisseri " female head | 278 - 10 - 4 |
| 11. Kariyatt male head | 724 - 10 - 0 |
| 12. " a male member | 362 - 5 - 0 |
| 13. " a female member | 362 - 5 - 0 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **The Kurangoth Nayar** | **1,427 - 12 - 9** |
| 1. Putiya Vittil male head | 350 - 3 - 2 |
| 2. " " " member | 150 - 0 - 0 |
| 3. " " two female members and a male | 244 - 7 - 4 |
| 4. Trikkeikal Cheriya, a male member | 75 - 13 - 4 |
| 5. Koderi madam, male head | 116 - 7 - 4 |
| 6. Kurangoth Tale two females | 107 - 2 - 4 |
| 7. " Vishnumangalam three females | 178 - 1 - 8 |
| **Kurangoth's dependent Poyyapratta Nayar** | |
| 1. A male | 155 - 9 - 7 |
| 2. Two females | 50 - 0 - 0 |
| **The Valluvanad Raja** | **16,415 - 1 - 7** |
| (No sthanams or palaces mentioned) | |
| **The Palghat Family** | **18,099 - 3 - 3** |
| 1. Chief sthanam | 13,898 - 4 - 6 |
| 2. Second sthanam | 2,857 - 3 - 3 |
| 3. Senior princess | 137 - 2 - 3 |
| 4. Naduviledam, a male | 517 - 13 - 9 |
| 5. Ilaya Achan edam, a male | 517 - 13 - 9 |
| 6. Kizhakka Konikkal Edam, a male | 170 - 13 - 9 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Palghat's dependent Nayars | 3,053 - 0 - 1 |
| 1. Kongad Nayar | 1,044 - 13 - 1 |
| 2. Edattara Nayar | 1,031 - 6 - 4 |
| 3. Mannur Nayar | 976 - 12 - 8 |
| Kavalappara Nayar | 4,567 - 10 - 3 |

(independent, claimed as dependent by Zamorins)

## Appendix II



List of principalities given to Heer van Rede on his assumption of duties as Comissary-General of the Dutch East India Company in 1694. Reproduced in full by Hamilton (1737), 1930 ed.

(Where the chiefdom is identifiable, the modern or current spelling of its name is given).

"The Province of Tipopo Soriwan (Tiruppappur Svarupam) can raise forces by its Clans, viz:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Terivancoar (Travancore) | 1,000,000 | men |
| Attinga (Attingal) | 30,000 | " |
| Eleda Soriwan (Elayadath Svarupam) | 50,000 | " |
| Peritalie (Peritally) | 3,000 | " |
| Seigenatie (Desinganad or Quilon) | 30,000 | " |
| Teirewey (Cheravai) | 15,000 | " |

"Odenadie Carree (Odanad):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Coilcolong (Kayamkulam) | 50,000 | " |
| Pana Pollie (Panappalli) | 15,000 | " |
| Martin Gallie (Karnnagapalli) | 15,000 | " |
| Carimbalie (Kartikapalli) | 15,000 | " |
| Teiom Balanore Koilie | 3,000 | " |
| Renbanie Aregalie | 3,000 | " |

"Rapolim (Edapilly):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Elengoly Serewan (Elangallur Svarupam) | 5,000 | " |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Courour Nadie (Kurumbranad): | | |
| Courour Mouta Coil | 15,000 | men |
| Billiatte Sevewan | 15,000 | " |
| "Badecancore (Vadakkumkur): | | |
| Manna Tellam | 30,000 | " |
| Moda Callie | 3,000 | " |
| Boy Pilcore | 15,000 | " |
| Kilmalle Core | 15,000 | " |
| "Perimba Daponadie (Perumpatappunad, or Cochin): | | |
| Martingaly Tavil (Matattinkal Tavazhi) | 3,000 | " |
| Moute Tavil (Mutta Tavazhi) | 3,000 | " |
| Palombe Tavil (Pallivirutti Tavazhi) | 3,000 | " |
| Teilor Tavil (Chaliyur Tavazhi) | 3,000 | " |
| Ela Tavil (Elaya Tavazhi) | 3,000 | " |
| "Chitawa Canaar (Chetwai coast) | | |
| Tellicherry Baakie<br>Elependre May Porombo | 3,000 | " |
| Dedamaadie Peneretta<br>Moeterte Manka Polie | 15,000 | " |
| "Perombara Cormaar: | | |
| Arregatte Calgampolie<br>Maralie Madonie | 15,000 | " |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Bambellendada (Vempalanad): | | |
| Kilpolie Chitway | 75,000 | men |
| Martingallie Coer | 37,000 | " |
| Tekellenore (Tekkumkur?) | 37,000 | " |
| Doenjatte Penmaal (Punjar Perumal) | 3,000 | " |
| "Cottenadie (Kuttanad) | | |
| Zembaga Cherry (Purakkad) | 30,000 | " |
| "Tesegidin Genatie (Desinganad or Quilon): | | |
| Elertecore | 10,000 | " |
| Moutere Coree | 10,000 | " |
| Ambada Coree | 10,000 | " |
| "Tesieragatta Nadie (Cheragattanad?): | | |
| Teiragalle Caymaal | 15,000 | " |
| Padanarie erte Caymaal | 8,000 | " |
| "Pindereretol Nade: | | |
| Pindereretol Nambi Deri (a Nambudiri) | 15,000 | " |
| Coil Pade | 1,000 | " |
| "Mangela Nade (Alangad): | | |
| Belatte Tavil (Veluta Tavazhi) | 10,000 | " |
| Carata Tavil (Karuta Tavazhi) | 15,000 | " |
| "Nambouries or Priests: | | |
| Bay Pinade | 6,000 | " |
| Aaron Ade | 2,000 | " |
| Merinade Nambouri | 3,000 | " |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Nanderetti Nade: | | |
| Coro Seir Caymal (Codachery Kaimal) | 30,000 | men |
| Cories Caymal (Coratty Kaimal) | 5,000 | " |
| Siangrande Caymal (Changaracodda Kaimal) | 5,000 | " |
| Panna Maketts Caymal (Panamukattu Kaimal) | 3,000 | " |
| "Tollapoli Nade (Talapilly): | | |
| Amacotta Nambedi (Ayinikuttu Nambidi) | 15,000 | " |
| Manacotta Nambedi (Manakkulam Nambidi) | 15,000 | " |
| Cacatte Nambedi (Kakkat Nambidi) | 15,000 | " |
| Tistul Nambedi | 15,000 | " |
| Terratekin Nair | 15,000 | " |
| "Nambiar, or Priests of the Second Order: | | |
| Relolaste Nambiar | 3,000 | " |
| Relo Canadarie | 30,000 | " |
| "Eranaden Caree (Ernad or Zamorins): | | |
| Cannal Canadrie (Kunnalakonthiri or Zamorin) | 40,000 | " |
| Rete Coil | 5,000 | " |
| Paro Pachoil (Parappanad) | 3,000 | " |
| Ropo Coil (Beypore) | 2,000 | " |
| "Tomera Serinade (Tamarasserinad): | | |
| Aya Nade | 20,000 | " |
| Payanade | 15,000 | " |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| "Iregale Nade (Iruvalinad), a Priest of the first Order[1] | 3,000 | men |
| "Candette Nayer | 10,000 | " |
| "Omnitrie (Unnithiri?) | 10,000 | " |
| "Palangier (Pazhayancheri) Nayer | 3,000 | " |
| "Mangalacka | 3,000 | " |
| "Dana Seir Ilerda | 10,000 | " |
| "Ramenatte Corie | 15,000 | " |
| "Polletti Nade: | | |
| Callistree Odirose Coilan (Kolathiri, of Udayamangalam Kovilakam<br>Palle Coilan Ziereck Coilan (Palli and Chirakkal Kovilakams) | 23,000 | " |
| Ballanore Burgary (Kadattanad) | 30,000 | " |
| Tellicherry Mota Naire | 15,000 | " |
| Zitre Caymal Mar | 30,000 | " |
| Alerte Tere Caymal | 30,000 | " |
| Alarte Nade Adovodie | 15,000 | " |
| Paravia Coil (Puravalya Kovilakam of Kottayam) | 60,000 | " |
| "Bayella Nade | | |
| Mangalette Naire | 1,000 | " |
| Manetane Naire | 1,000 | " |
| Callepatte Naire | 1,000 | " |
| Teyka Patte Naire | 1,000 | " |
| Motrel Naire | 3,000 | " |

1. Iruvalanid was actually under Nambiar chiefs, who are high Nayars, and not Brahmins.

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